



# AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THIRD EDITION



Edited by  
**RICHARD DEVETAK**  
**JIM GEORGE**  
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**CAMBRIDGE**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS**

### **Third edition**

*An Introduction to International Relations* is a comprehensive introduction to the history, theories, developments and debates that shape the dynamic discipline of International Relations and contemporary world politics. Bringing together an expert author team comprising leading academics from Australia and around the world, it allows readers to explore the discipline from both Australian and global perspectives.

Known for its clear, easy-to-read style and relevant, real-world examples, the text has been fully updated and revised to reflect current research and the changing global political climate. This edition features extensive new material on: international history from World War I to World War II; international law; the globalisation of international society; and terrorism.

A companion website for instructors offers additional case studies, critical thinking questions and links to relevant video and web materials that bring International Relations theory to life. The cases explore contemporary global issues, including drone warfare and the rise of populism, from an Australian perspective.

The third edition of *An Introduction to International Relations* is an indispensable guide for readers approaching the study of International Relations for the first time.

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**For Naomi, Chiara and Allegra**

**For Sara**

**For James, Tatiana and Jonah**

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## *Preface and acknowledgements*

This textbook is designed specifically for students studying introductory International Relations (IR) courses. Like any good textbook, it aims to introduce students to the study of IR by laying out its chief theories, main actors and institutions, and leading issues in a manner that both excites interest and lucidly explains topics for students with no previous background in IR. Carving up the topics of a complex, dynamic, growing discipline like IR is no easy task. Decisions inevitably must be made about which topics to include and which to exclude. The topics chosen no doubt reflect but one particular perspective of the discipline's present make-up – one account of what is important for students to learn and what is not. Since there is no single correct way to present the material to undergraduate students, there is always a degree of arbitrariness involved in topic selection, and we do not pretend otherwise. However, we believe that the structure adopted here, developed and adapted over many combined years of teaching undergraduate introductory IR courses, offers one useful way into the wide range of fascinating topics that fall under the heading 'international relations'.

Once again we have revised and updated chapters from the previous edition, but we have also added new chapters and a new part. The textbook is now divided into four parts: [Part 1](#) on theories of IR; [Part 2](#) on international

history; [Part 3](#) on what we term the ‘traditional agenda’ of IR, which focuses on states, war and law; and [Part 4](#) on the ‘new agenda’, which focuses on globalisation and global governance. These are explicated in more detail in the [Introduction](#), but it is worth emphasising that the new agenda does not succeed the traditional agenda in either time or intellectual resourcefulness. The distinction between traditional and new agendas is a heuristic device meant to remind students that the discipline has evolved and changed, and to encourage reflection on the discipline’s historical character. Quite often, textbooks imply that our present conception of the discipline represents something like the end-point in the discipline’s ineluctable progression from primitive origins to full development. This conceit is easy to succumb to in the absence of historical-mindedness. We hope that a greater appreciation of the past will enable students to gain a better understanding of how the discipline has come to assume its present historical form. This should also encourage students to reflect more deeply on the sources of the tensions, debates and disagreements that both shape IR and make it one of the most intellectually exciting disciplines in the human and social sciences today.

There are a number of people we need to thank. A handful of individuals were directly and actively instrumental in the production of this textbook. First, we would like to thank all the contributors for generously giving their time, expertise and effort to the writing. Textbooks may not receive much recognition in modern research-intensive universities, but they remain absolutely indispensable for educating students in those same institutions. The decision of so many leading scholars to willingly contribute to this textbook is testament to their commitment to the discipline and, most importantly, to students. A special thank you must go to the new contributors, some of whom came on board at late notice. All the new contributors are internationally recognised and greatly enhance the textbook’s quality and global relevance. Second, we would like to

thank Lucy Russell and Olivia Tolich at Cambridge University Press, who have supported this third edition and demonstrated immense patience. Third, a special thank you to Anthony Burke who, while unable to co-edit this edition, continues to shape it with his previous editorial and intellectual contributions.

We would also like to thank a collection of other people. They may not have had a direct hand in the textbook, but indirectly they have contributed to it. First of all, we owe a debt to our own teachers, without whom we would not ourselves be teaching, let alone editing textbooks for future generations of students.

Richard would like to acknowledge, once again, his enduring debt of gratitude to his exemplary teachers, mentors and friends, Andrew Linklater, Peter Lawler, Hidemi Suganami and Tim Dunne, and past cohorts of students at Monash and the University of Queensland. He would also like to thank his co-editors, Jim and Sarah, for their good judgement, collegiality and responsiveness, and for their readiness to take on this ambitious project. It was a pleasure to work with Jim once again, and to welcome Sarah.

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**Richard Devetak, Jim George and Sarah Percy**

*Brisbane and Canberra*

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# Introduction:

## The origins and changing agendas of international relations



**Richard Devetak**

[Introduction](#)

[What are international relations?](#)

[International Relations as a discipline: Traditions, origins and evolution](#)

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## **Introduction**

This Introduction begins by outlining what is meant by international relations. It then tells the story of how and why the academic study of international relations emerged when it did in the early twentieth century. Knowing something about the [discipline](#)'s origins does not tell us everything we need to know about

international relations today, but it will help us to understand the legacy left by the discipline's original purpose and by older traditions of thought. Following that, it considers the need to 'globalise' the study of international relations, to make it an academic discipline more open to non-Western perspectives and forms of knowledge. It then sketches the contours of the changing agenda of international relations – a shift some scholars describe as a transition from international relations to world politics, or from the 'traditional' to the 'new' agenda. Although there can be little doubt that new theoretical and conceptual tools have become necessary as political reality has changed, we should not assume that the myriad changes to our world have rendered the 'traditional' agenda and its theories obsolete. Far from it: the 'new' agenda, as we shall see, supplements but does not supplant the 'traditional' agenda. It is now more important than ever to consider the relationships between 'traditional' and 'new' agendas, and to globalise international relations.

## **What are international relations?**

Every day, the global news media carry stories of events involving foreign governments and their populations. Usually featured under the heading of 'international affairs' or 'world news', these stories all too frequently tell of political violence, lives and livelihoods lost, [human rights](#) violated, infrastructure damaged and hopes for the restoration of [peace](#) and prosperity dashed. [War](#), [terrorism](#), civil war and political upheaval rather than peace make the news headlines – and understandably so, because the violent conflict of war so visibly ravages human societies. 'If it bleeds, it leads', as the cynical media adage goes.

For over 2000 years of recorded history, humans have been fascinated and frustrated by war and its consequences, so we should not be surprised by its continuing pre-eminence. But human societies are harmed by so much more than war. Chronic under-development, poverty, political repression, racism and other human rights violations, environmental degradation and climate change are no less harmful, albeit less visible. Occasionally, however, the plight of the world's impoverished populations becomes headline news when famines occur or natural disasters such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, tsunamis or avalanches strike, compounding already fragile or impoverished political societies. Sympathies will be aroused in faraway places, and celebrities, [humanitarian](#) organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) and canny politicians will talk the talk of collective grief, human community and global responsibility. Excitement will die down after a flurry of activity and the poor souls will inevitably be cast back to the margins of international attention as developed countries return to more pressing domestic matters – tax cuts, elections, salacious scandals, presidential tweets and so on. So goes the daily round of international relations: war and peace, poverty and under-development, global attention and global neglect.



**Figure 0.1** *Graffiti*, Sarajevo 2005

This commonsense understanding of international relations only scratches the surface of all that is covered by the discipline of International Relations (IR) (see [Box 0.1](#)). So what precisely do we mean by ‘international relations’? To answer this question, let us first say a few things about what it is not, before turning to an account of what it is.

**Box 0.1:** Terminology

**What are the differences between International Relations and international relations, and international politics and world politics?**

It is conventional to differentiate the discipline of ‘International Relations’ from the subject matter of ‘international relations’ by the use of upper and lower case letters respectively. As Chris Brown ([1997](#): 3) puts it, “‘International Relations’ (upper case) is the study of ‘international relations’ (lower case)’.

*International politics* is used here as a synonym for international relations. It does, however, have the advantage of highlighting the political dimension of relations that are international.

*World or global politics*: Insofar as new actors, issues, structures and processes are thought to have emerged in recent decades as a result of [globalisation](#), rendering the traditional state-focused agenda incomplete, some scholars prefer ‘world’ or ‘global politics’ to ‘international relations’. This has prompted some scholars to talk of an historic shift from ‘international relations’ to ‘world politics’ or ‘global society’ (R.B.J. Walker [1995](#); Barnett and Sikkink [2008](#)).

First, the study of international relations is not to be equated with ‘current affairs’. It is important not to reduce international relations to the lead stories of the global news media. News, by its nature, is ephemeral: each day brings a new story to tell. Moreover, news agencies make no attempt at drawing connections between stories. Their concern is not with showing how the stories ‘hang together’ or relate to each other; it is solely with reporting the news, so that each news item is reported independently of others. IR (the academic study of international relations), by contrast, seeks to go beyond the ephemeral and common sense: to reflect more deeply on events, structures, processes and actors, and to offer explanations, interpretations and [normative](#) analyses. Second, the study of international relations is not reducible to what happens in particular countries, even though it may include this. Political machinations in other countries – especially powerful nations – always hold particular interest; Washington politics is never far from the headlines. But in IR, any interest in the politics of other countries will be determined by how these impact on or play out in the international sphere or how they are shaped by international forces. Third, IR is not reducible to foreign policy analysis, though once again it includes this within its scope (see Waltz [1979](#): 121–2 for one explanation).

Turning to a more positive definition of international relations, we can start by saying that it refers to *external relations among* [nations](#), [states](#) and *peoples* – although, as we explain below, this statement will need to be qualified to some considerable extent. The adjective ‘international’ was coined by the English political philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1780. The neologism’s purpose was to capture *relations among nations* in a single word (Suganami [1978](#)). Although ‘international’ literally means relations among nations, it has for most of its existence referred to relations among states. In Bentham’s time, ‘nation’ and

‘state’ were often used interchangeably, so his meaning was closer to what we should probably call ‘interstate’ relations. In any case, *international* relations have been distinguished first and foremost from *domestic* politics. Ian Clark (1999) calls this the ‘Great Divide’ (see [Table 0.1](#)).

**Table 0.1** The ‘Great Divide’

<b>Domestic</b>	<b>International</b>
Inside	Outside
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Monopoly over instruments of violence	Decentralised instruments of violence
Lawful authority	Self-help
Security	Insecurity/Security dilemma
Justice	Power
Community	Friends and enemies
Peace and order	War

Leading scholars have for decades defined international relations by opposing the international and domestic realms as if they represented a ‘Great Divide’. Regarding what constitutes this ‘Great Divide’, the most influential realist IR theorist of the late twentieth century, Kenneth Waltz (1979: 103), remarked that, ‘The difference between national and international politics lies not in the use of force but in the different modes of organization for doing something about it.’ What, then, are the possible modes of organisation? Waltz

offered two – and only two – organising principles: [hierarchy](#) and [anarchy](#). Relations between units (or actors) are either *hierarchical*, involving clear lines of authority and obedience, or they are *anarchical*, involving no such lines of authority and obedience (Waltz [1979](#): 88). There would appear to be no other possibilities. The key, according to Waltz, is governance: is there a supreme authority with the right to lay down and enforce the law? If the answer is ‘yes’, then we must be in the hierarchical realm of domestic politics – politics *within* the state. If the answer is ‘no’, then we must be in the anarchical realm of international relations – politics *between* states. In any case, the presumed differences between domestic and international politics seem to vindicate Martin Wight’s ([1966](#): 21) observation that, ‘It has become natural to think of international politics as the untidy fringe of domestic politics.’ As I suggest below, while it has indeed become natural to think in these terms, there may be good reasons for casting doubt over the ‘Great Divide’ as the point of departure for IR today.

According to the ‘Great Divide’, domestic politics takes place on the *inside* of states whereas international relations take place on the *outside*, as if they were two mutually exclusive realms. Domestic politics is premised on the presence of a central authority or government that has monopoly control over the instruments of violence, that can lay down and enforce the law, that establishes and maintains [order](#) and [security](#), and that permits justice and peace to be delivered to the community of citizens. International relations are the negative image of domestic politics. In contrast to the domestic realm, the international is premised on the absence of an over-arching authority or government that can lay down and enforce the law because the instruments of violence are dispersed and decentralised. This establishes ripe conditions for insecurity, where injustice and war are permanent potentials and regular actualities for states. It is a world of friends and enemies, where [power](#) rather than justice will determine

international outcomes, and where states cannot afford to put their trust or security in others. States are trapped in a '[security dilemma](#)', whereby measures taken to enhance their security lead others to take similar counter-measures and in the process generate further mistrust and insecurity.

Perhaps the term that distinguishes international relations more than any other is *anarchy*. Anarchy – meaning the absence of rule, but not necessarily disorder and chaos – has been the core presumption and [constitutive](#) principle for much of the discipline's history (Onuf [1989](#): 166; Schmidt [1998](#)). Richard Ashley ([1989](#)) has called IR the 'anarchy problematique' – a field of knowledge revolving around the organising principle of anarchy.

## **International Relations as a discipline: Traditions, origins and evolution**

As centres of research and learning, universities have long divided knowledge into different disciplines. This division is heuristic – that is to say, it is meant to help facilitate learning. A discipline comprises a distinctive focus, a set of institutions and traditions of thought. All three are crucial to the development and growth of a field or body of knowledge. But it is worth noting that 'discipline' has another, not altogether unrelated, meaning: to bring under control, train to obedience, maintain order. Disciplines thus help to maintain intellectual order by retaining a focus and staying clear of distracting, extraneous issues.

First, a discipline carves out a branch of learning focused on a relatively distinct subject matter. I say 'relatively' because attempts to cordon off one subject from all others are bound to fail or to appear arbitrary. For example, where do we draw the boundaries between international politics, international

ethics, [international law](#) and international economics? Politics, ethics, law and economics intersect and overlap in so many ways that efforts to draw final boundaries around them would be futile and possibly unhelpful, since understanding the politics of international relations cannot be separated from an understanding of the ethical, legal and economic dimensions of these relations.

Nevertheless, if a discipline implies a subject matter that is relatively distinguishable from others, it must have questions and topics it calls its own. Although agreement will never be total, the questions and topics to be addressed should meet with broad agreement, despite invariably changing over time. Some disagreement about the scope of a discipline is to be expected, but there will always be dominant tendencies – questions and topics that occupy the thought and research of most students and scholars (see [Box 0.2](#)). These will define the discipline at any given moment, but there will always be other questions and topics that are neglected or ignored by the mainstream.

#### **Box 0.2:** Discussion points

##### **A divided discipline?**

In the late 1980s, International Relations undertook a self-examination. Eminent scholar K.J. Holsti ([1985](#): 1) lamented that ‘International theory is in a state of disarray’. The ‘intellectual consensus’ that guided research and learning for over three centuries had, in Holsti’s opinion, ‘broken down’. No longer was there ‘a consensus on the subjects of inquiry and theorizing. The view that international theory should be organized around the structures and processes of the states system, the activities of the [great powers](#) and their decision makers, particularly as they relate to war and peace, is no longer accepted by a significant number of scholars’ (Holsti [1985](#): 2). Holsti’s concern was not so much that the dominant

view of the discipline's focus and purpose had been abandoned – this was reasonable given the fundamental changes that had occurred in the twentieth century – but that the 'theoretical profusion' had made coherent dialogue and debate very difficult. His fear, in short, was that the discipline might never regain its focus and sense of purpose. Holsti was not alone. Mark Hoffman ([1987](#)) accepted Holsti's assessment of a discipline divided over purpose, focus or appropriate methodology, but advocated a 'next stage' in which [critical theory](#) (see [Chapter 4](#)) would reconstruct and reorient the discipline. Others, such as Yosef Lapid ([1989a](#): 83) questioned whether establishing a 'new hegemonic orthodoxy' would be 'possible' or 'desirable', preferring to celebrate theoretical diversity (see also George and Campbell [1990](#)). For fuller treatment of this approach, see [Chapter 1](#).

Second, disciplines grow within institutions and grow their own institutions. Universities are the most obvious sites for the institutionalisation of the research and teaching of particular subjects, but they are not alone, as we shall see. Departments, schools or centres have been established in universities around the world to study international relations. The first was established in 1919 at the University of Wales, in the seaside town of Aberystwyth, when Welsh industrialist and philanthropist David Davies established the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics. The London School of Economics and the University of Oxford followed shortly afterwards, with the establishment of Chairs in 1923 and 1930 respectively. The institutionalised study of IR in the United States began with the establishment of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in 1919, which was followed by the

University of Southern California's School of International Relations in 1924. In Switzerland, the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva was established in 1927, becoming the first university dedicated to the study of international relations.

In the United States, the study of International Relations generally remained a sub-field of Political Science (Schmidt [2002](#): 6). In the most detailed history of American IR's origins, Brian Schmidt ([1998](#)) has shown that much of the discipline's early formation grew out of late nineteenth-century inquiries into colonial administration and national imperialism. In his path-breaking *White World Order, Black Power Politics*, Robert Vitalis ([2015](#)) has shown how race and race subjugation were central preoccupations of the early twentieth-century discipline of American IR. His disciplinary history also reveals the discrimination and exclusion suffered by a number of African American scholars to whom Vitalis ([2015](#)) refers as the 'Howard School' of IR. Disciplines, it should be noted, are not without their politics, nor are they without their exclusions and amnesia.

The institutionalisation of academic areas of study is vital because it provides housing for teaching and research. Both teaching and research – the two pre-eminent tasks of university departments – are crucial to the accumulation, expansion and transmission of bodies of knowledge. Teaching passes on knowledge and modes of analysis from one generation to the next in the classroom. Research, of course, needs to be published, so that findings and analyses can be widely disseminated and tested, not only from one generation to the next but to contemporary teachers and students as well. Journals, periodicals, books, conferences and workshops are sites for debate, the exchange of ideas and the sharpening of arguments, all of which reproduce and revise a discipline's body of knowledge.

Disciplines also grow their own institutions, such as academic journals and professional associations. Added to journals are professional bodies such as the British International Studies Association (BISA), the European International Studies Association (EISA), the Japan Association of International Relations (JAIR), the American-based International Studies Association (ISA) and the World International Studies Committee (WISC), which organise conferences and facilitate other academic activities. Some, such as BISA, EISA, JAIR and ISA, also publish academic journals: the *Review of International Studies* (since 1975), the *European Journal of International Relations* (since 1995), *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* (since 2001) and *International Studies Quarterly* (since 1957, although it was published under the name *Background on World Politics* until 1970) respectively. In Australia, the *Australian Journal of International Affairs* has been published since 1946 (originally under the title *Australian Outlook*). Think tanks have also made a long-standing contribution to the advancement of learning, and are an integral part of the discipline's landscape. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was established in 1910; the Royal Institute of International Affairs was established in 1920; and its antipodean offshoots, the Australian and New Zealand Institutes of International Affairs emerged in 1933 and 1934 respectively.

Third, a discipline draws upon traditions of thought that have developed and evolved around the subject matter. Although the first university department was not established until 1919, it would be a mistake to believe that the study of international relations began at that point. When departments were being established, scholars and students were not inventing a discipline out of thin air; they had over two millennia of recorded words, thoughts and actions to draw upon. Cognate departments such as Government, Law and History also provided

useful resources (Schmidt [1998](#)). But so did thinkers subsequently drafted into the IR canon.

Thucydides (c. 460–406 BC), Niccolò [Machiavelli](#) (1469–1527) and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), for example, may not have taught in universities, but they wrote about the actors and events that shaped the ‘international relations’, as we now call it, of their day. Care must be taken here, however, because the actors and events they described and analysed are vastly different from those that now animate international relations. Moreover, these great thinkers did not limit themselves to the external relations of actors – whether city-states, empires or sovereign states. Indeed, it is closer to the truth to say that they discussed what we would call international relations either indirectly or only in occasional passages of their classic texts. So we need to be careful, when discussing the past, not to commit the historical sin of *anachronism*: discussing one historical epoch in terms of language, concepts and understandings borrowed from another. In other words, we risk anachronism when we speak of these great thinkers as contributors to IR or adhering to one of our modern traditions of thought because, in fact, they did not neatly distinguish international relations from domestic politics or international law or ethics in the way the discipline of IR has done since its inception. The ‘Great Divide’, the ‘anarchy problematique’ and the categories of realism and liberalism were not part of their thinking.

### **Traditions of thought**

What are the traditions of thought that have influenced the study of international relations? How one answers this question depends on which classificatory scheme one uses. There are several such schemes. After World War II, the dominant classificatory scheme was of [idealism](#) or [liberalism](#) on the one hand and [realism](#) on the other (see [Table 0.2](#)); this was how E.H. Carr ([1946](#))

presented the field of study. Arguably, this scheme still dominates the discipline today in the United States – albeit in revised form as a debate between [neoliberalism](#) and [neo-realism](#) (see Baldwin [1993](#)). It is vital to come to grips with these two dominant IR theories, as they have largely set the parameters of the discipline, shaping its core assumptions and key questions.

**Table 0.2** Realism and liberalism compared

	<b>Realism</b>	<b>Liberalism</b>
Main actor	States	Individuals
Contextual focus	Anarchy	Institutions
Fundamental value	Security	Liberty
Elemental behaviour	Conflict	Cooperation
Outlook	Pessimism	Optimism
View of history	Recurrence and repetition	Progressive change

Realists argue that states exist in a condition of anarchy that compels them to seek and to balance power to ensure their survival and security (see [Chapter 3](#)). They paint international relations as a tragic realm of ‘[power politics](#)’ where ‘[national interests](#)’ clash and moral claims hold little sway. For realists, the character of international relations remains unchanged through history. Marked by what Kenneth Waltz ([1979](#): 66) calls ‘a dismaying persistence’ of war, international relations is, in Wight’s ([1966](#): 26) words, ‘the realm of recurrence and repetition’. Thucydides, the great Athenian historian of *The Peloponnesian War*, brilliant Florentine diplomat and writer Niccolò Machiavelli, and towering English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (intellectually and physically

towering – he was almost 200 centimetres tall, well above average height in the seventeenth century) are canonical names in realism’s hall of fame. They not only provided insight into their own times, but also offered wisdom and insight that realists believe transcend time. In the realist view, if Thucydides and Hobbes were transported to our own time, they would observe nothing different other than the names of the actors (Waltz [1979](#): 66; Wight [1966](#): 26).

Liberals take a more optimistic view. If realists see history as static or cyclical, liberals see it as progressive. They tend to emphasise humanity’s capacity to improve: they are committed to ideals of technological and economic as well as moral, legal and political progress (see [Chapter 2](#)). That the world is anarchical and war-prone is as true for liberals as it is for realists, but the former believe it is possible and necessary for humankind to escape the [Hobbesian](#) ‘state of war’ – a condition in which states are insecure and constantly preparing for war. Strategies of ‘peace through law’ and ‘peace through commerce’ are the dominant liberal approaches. In international relations, they see the gradual development and strengthening of international trade, international law and international organisations as the key to world order (Suganami [1989](#)). Names in the liberal pantheon include great English political philosophers John Locke and John Stuart Mill, and the superlative philosopher of Königsberg (now called Kaliningrad), Immanuel [Kant](#).

Others have posited a tripartite scheme. One of the most common is the tripartite scheme of realism, liberalism and [Marxism](#), or variations thereof (Doyle [1997](#); Holsti [1985](#); Walt [1998](#)). This extends and complicates the realism/liberalism debate by adding a Marxist tradition of thought. This tradition shifted emphasis away from states to the historical development of the capitalist system and the class conflict it generated (see Kubáľková and Cruickshank [1985](#); Linklater [1990](#)). It redirected the focus to an examination of how the twin logics of capitalist development and geopolitical rivalry interacted. It is worth noting

here that Marxism played a vital role in stimulating the Critical Theory pioneered by Robert Cox ([1981](#)) and Andrew Linklater ([1990](#)), because Marx critically analysed the tensions between hopes of universal freedom and concrete realities of inequality and oppression (see [Chapter 4](#)).

In his famous lectures at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the 1950s, Martin Wight ([1991](#)) also distinguished three traditions of thought, but rather eccentrically called them realism, [rationalism](#) and [revolutionism](#) (also see Bull [1976](#)). If realism was the tradition associated with power politics and ‘the blood and iron and immorality men’, as Wight called them (Bull [1976](#): 104), revolutionism was associated with the perpetual peace of liberal internationalism *and* the [revolutionary](#) internationalism of Marxism – ‘the subversion and liberation and missionary men’. Rationalism was a ‘middle way’ that sought to avoid the extremes of realism and revolutionism. It is a tradition of thought most closely associated with seventeenth-century Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (who, by contrast with Hobbes, was barely 150 centimetres tall), and eighteenth-century Swiss lawyer, Emer de Vattel – ‘the law and order and keep your word men’, to use Wight’s description (Bull [1976](#): 104). Rationalists accept the realist premise that states exist in a condition of anarchy (where no state has the authority to lay down and enforce the law), but deny that this condition is bereft of rules and [norms](#). Rather, they argue that, to use the felicitous phrase of Wight’s foremost protégé, Hedley Bull ([1977](#)), states exist in an ‘anarchical society’. States tend to form international societies where order is maintained through mechanisms such as international law, diplomacy, balances of power, great power management and occasionally war (Bull [1977](#); see also [Chapter 18](#)). This ‘middle way’ continues today under the name of the [English School](#) (see Dunne [1998](#); Linklater and Suganami [2006](#)) and has some affinities with neoliberal [institutionalism](#) (Hurrell [1995](#)) (see [Chapter 2](#)).

In Wight's hands, the three traditions (the 'three Rs') were not meant to be water-tight containers, but more like 'streams, with eddies and cross-currents, sometimes interlacing' (Wight [1991](#): 260). To continue the metaphor: in practice, canonical thinkers tend to cross and sometimes straddle streams rather than soak their feet permanently in one. Wight's purpose was merely to present the traditions as historically embodied styles of thought handed down by scholars and practitioners alike.

Needless to say, there are various classificatory schemes, each as arbitrary as the next. What matters is not so much the historical veracity of the scheme as the analytical tools it serves up. Traditions of thought, whichever scheme we choose to employ, provide us with the premises, tenets and concepts without which we could not intelligibly discuss and analyse international relations. Traditions are the source of our lexicon, the common vocabulary we use to study our subject – even if, as Renée Jeffery ([2005](#)) contends, the very idea of a 'tradition of thought' is questionable.

We have to depart from somewhere (there is actually no point outside all tradition), so we start with what the competing traditions leave to us. But traditions are not given and homogeneous. They are 'invented', which is not to say that traditions are false or arbitrarily fabricated, only that the inheritance must be selected and interpreted before it can be received. Traditions are also heterogeneous, comprising multiple strands and legacies. What we believe they leave to us depends on how we sift through, select and interpret the tradition's inheritance (see [Box 0.3](#)). As Jim George ([1994](#): 196) rightly points out, 'the "great texts" of International Relations can be read in ways entirely contrary to their ritualized disciplinary treatment'. This is why IR has, in recent years, witnessed an 'historiographical turn' (Armitage [2004](#), [2013](#); Bell [2001](#); Keene [2005](#)) – reflecting on the aims and methods of writing history, particularly intellectual history or the history of ideas. In keeping with this historiographical

turn, this Introduction, along with the textbook as a whole, aims to encourage and cultivate what Herbert Butterfield ([1955](#): 17) called ‘historical-mindedness’.

**Box 0.3:** Discussion points

**Was Thucydides a realist?**

As an illustration of how traditions depend on interpretation, consider the tendency of realists and others to assign Thucydides uncritically to the realist tradition. Behind this assignation lies the supposition that the realist tradition is centred on the concept of material or military power and that Thucydides is a realist *par excellence*. The one episode in his account of the Peloponnesian War that is always invoked is the ‘Melian Dialogue’. According to Thucydides’ ([1972](#): 402) narrative, the Athenian envoy says to his Melian counterpart, ‘the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept’. Captured in this remark is one of the most powerful expressions of realism’s emphasis on material power determining international outcomes – which is why it is realism’s favourite hymn, and why Thucydides is viewed as the first great realist. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Thucydides subscribes to this realist view, since he is simply retelling the story. In fact, much else in his narrative suggests that Thucydides would be out of place in the realist tradition, not least because he places a good deal of emphasis on normative standards for assessing conduct and moral responsibility. Furthermore, the Athenian empire’s reliance on military force and war proves insufficient to prevent eventual collapse. We can conclude, therefore, that how traditions are understood and who is included in them are indeed matters of selection and interpretation.

To summarise, as Wight has suggested, and as R.B.J. Walker ([1993](#): Chapter 2) and Jim George ([1994](#): 192–7) have amply demonstrated, traditions of thought are never as internally coherent or self-enclosed as they initially appear to be. Common though it may be to bundle Machiavelli and Hobbes together in the realist tradition, they actually differ considerably on many key points, especially on how they view time and change in politics, with Machiavelli seeing politics as permanently in flux and Hobbes holding to a more static and spatial conception that is perhaps more consistent with some aspects of the ‘Great Divide’.

### **Origins and evolution of the discipline**

The origins of the discipline cannot be reduced to a single source or moment, but there can be little doubt that one historical moment precipitated its institutional establishment: World War I (1914–18) as we know it now, but the ‘Great War’ as it was known before World War II. It was the most intense and mechanised war yet experienced, with new technologies – including the advent of air power – allowing for new heights of destruction to be reached. The unprecedented destructiveness prompted calls for the eradication of war; it was indeed often referred to as the ‘War to End All Wars’. The traumatic experience of the Great War for Europeans was perhaps compounded by the fact that the years preceding it were relatively peaceful and stable, though not for [colonised](#) peoples. The pre-war years also witnessed a marked increase in ‘the number of multilateral conferences, institutions, and organizations’ (Reus-Smit [1999](#): 133). In particular, significant strides were taken regarding the laws of war with the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, which seemed to vindicate liberal optimism for international reform.

After the war, an understandable tide of anti-war sentiment surged throughout Europe – the continent that had witnessed so many terrible wars over the centuries. It was not only war's destructiveness that fuelled anti-war sentiment; it was also its apparent futility. As an instrument of foreign policy, war appeared to many to be ineffective and counter-productive (see Angell [1912](#)).

We might view such sentiments as a natural reaction to war. But until the eighteenth century, while war had always been lamented, it was rarely viewed as eradicable. This is why English jurist Sir Henry Maine (cited in Howard [2001](#): 1) observed in the middle of the nineteenth century, 'War appears to be as old as mankind, but peace is a modern invention.' It was only with the initiation of 'plans for perpetual peace' in the eighteenth century, drafted most famously by the Abbé Saint Pierre and Immanuel Kant, that thinkers and scholars put their minds to determining how peace might prevail permanently over war in a system of states. But only after the Great War did a widespread 'peace movement' arise, with the intention of eliminating war for all time.

To this sentiment were added practical, institutional measures, including the establishment of the League of Nations at Geneva in 1920 and, in accordance with the League's Covenant, the Permanent Court of International Justice at The Hague in 1922 (originally the Permanent Court of Arbitration, as established under the 1899 Hague Conference). According to Chris Reus-Smit ([1999](#)), a new *legislative* principle of procedural justice emerged at this time, which found concrete expression in these new institutions. Two precepts informed this new legislative justice: 'first, that only those subject to the rules have the right to define them and, second, that the rules of society must apply equally to all' (Reus-Smit [1999](#): 129). Reus-Smit ([1999](#): 123–54) traces the origins of these ideas back to the eighteenth century – to the [Enlightenment](#) and the American and French Revolutions, but it is arguable that it was only in the aftermath of the

Great War that a new diplomatic and legal order took shape based on contractual international law and [multilateralism](#). The war not only marked a break with the previous peace; it brought about a different kind of peace, one where permanent international institutions were designed ‘to promote international co-operation and to achieve peace and security’, as expressed in the League of Nations Covenant (printed in Claude [1964](#): 409).

This is the general international context in which the academic discipline of International Relations was established (see [Chapter 9](#)). It was a period of progressive institutionalisation of liberal-constitutional principles as a reaction to war (see [Chapter 2](#)). This ‘desire ... to prevent future wars’, says William Olson ([1972](#): 12), ‘must never be forgotten’ when assessing the discipline’s origins. More than just the study of the causes and conditions of war and peace, the study of international relations was, from the outset, guided by a purpose: to develop theories aimed at preventing or eliminating war. It would do so by focusing on states and their interactions in the states system, but also by bringing liberal tenets to bear on the prevailing bellicose system. Liberals such as Sir Norman Angell and US President Woodrow Wilson believed that a lasting peace could only be achieved by overcoming the [balance of power](#) and secret diplomacy; they argued for developing a new diplomatic and legal order around international organisations based on practices of [collective security](#) and open diplomacy (see Ashworth [1999](#); Woodrow Wilson [1918](#)). ‘The distinctive characteristic of these writers,’ says Hedley Bull ([1972](#): 34), was their belief in progress – especially the belief that

the system of international relations that had given rise to the First World War was capable of being transformed into a fundamentally more peaceful and just world order; that under the impact of the awakening of democracy, the growth of ‘the international mind’, the development of the League of Nations,

the good works of men of peace or the enlightenment spread by their own teachings, it was in fact being transformed.

Liberal-constitutional values and ideals thus set the agenda for the discipline in the interwar years, against which E.H. Carr aimed his withering criticism. First published in 1939, Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* ([1946](#)) had a massive influence on the discipline of International Relations. Carr's book is a brilliant polemical attack on the liberal thinking associated with Angell, Wilson, Alfred Zimmern and others, which he characterised as a hollow sham (Carr [1946](#): 89). Carr believed [utopianism](#) (for which you can substitute liberalism) utterly failed to take account of power in its analysis of international relations; it ignored Machiavelli's injunction to deal with what *was* the case, rather than what *ought to be* the case (Carr [1946](#): 63). The structure of Carr's masterpiece revolves around the dichotomy between realism and liberalism. In fact, he helped create the impression that the newly established discipline was dominated by a debate between realism and liberalism. This subsequently became known as the 'first great debate', although – as Andreas Osiander ([1998](#)), Peter Wilson ([1998](#)), Lucian Ashworth ([1999](#)), and Quirk and Vigneswaran ([2005](#)) have shown – no debate actually occurred, if by that we mean a series of exchanges between realists and liberals. Indeed, recent work suggests that the very idea of narrating the discipline's history as a series of 'great debates' is questionable. Even so, it is important for students to learn and appreciate the stories the discipline has told about itself, which is why I persist with the narrative.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, when scholars began to reflect more on the origins and evolution of the discipline, it has become conventional to narrate the discipline's history through a recounting of 'great debates'. The 'second great debate' is said to have been a methodological quarrel in the 1960s and 1970s between 'behaviouralism' and 'traditionalism'; at stake was the question, 'What is the most appropriate way of pursuing and acquiring

knowledge in international relations?’ Bull ([1966](#)) framed the debate in terms of ‘scientific versus classical’ methods. He identified two broad criticisms of the scientific approach, which seeks to emulate the methods of the natural sciences in its attempts to explain international politics. The first is that it cannot live up to its aspirations and must fall back on non-scientific (read ‘classical’) methods. The second is that it is an inappropriate method for studying many of the central issues in international relations, because even empirical questions are not susceptible to pure observation, but rather depend upon ‘intuition or judgment’ (Bull [1966](#): 367), and also because many questions are in part normative. Essentially, Bull thought the ‘scientific’ approach removed students and scholars too far from the stuff of international relations – ‘as remote from the substance of international politics as the inmates of a Victorian nunnery were from the study of sex’ (Bull [1966](#): 366). Bull defended the ‘classical’ approach, which he contended was interpretive, more historical and better attuned to normative judgements.

Chris Brown ([1997](#): 36–7) is probably right to describe the second debate as a ‘minor skirmish’ rather than a ‘great debate’, since it was in fact ‘something of a non-event’ at the time. Having said that, it was the first time the study of international relations had opened itself up to theoretical self-reflection. Although little was resolved by the debate, it highlighted the importance of reflecting on inescapable questions related to how we acquire knowledge. Knowledge does not fall from the heavens fully formed, so clarifying how to pursue or acquire knowledge is essential – it helps us discriminate between competing descriptions or analyses of international relations. Indeed, this unresolved question feeds into the ‘third great debate’, which according to Yosef Lapid ([1989b](#)), pitted [positivism](#) against post-positivism. In this debate, the mainstream approaches of neo-realism and neoliberalism defended themselves against a variety of ‘critical’ theories. Steve Smith ([1996](#): 11, 13), in a useful

account of what is at stake in the ‘third debate’, accuses positivism of restricting our understanding of ‘what kinds of things [exist] in international relations’ and of narrowly limiting ethical and practical possibilities. The theoretical profusion associated with the ‘third debate’ can usefully be linked to the changing agenda of international relations. But before that, the chapter reflects on the fact that much of what passes for IR is knowledge produced in and by the Western academy, drawing upon Western traditions of thought. If IR is to be a truly global discipline, it must overcome its Western parochialism.

## **Globalising International Relations**

In his Presidential Address to the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association in 2013, Amitav Acharya made an impassioned case for making IR a genuinely global discipline. The point of globalising IR, he argued, was not to create a single global discipline that was homogeneous in its outlook and methods, but to create a more diverse and inclusive discipline grounded in world history, that eschewed exceptionalism, and that integrated regions and forms of knowledge emanating from beyond the West (Acharya [2014](#): 649). This involves not simply inquiring into the different ways that world politics is studied and understood *outside* the West – although this is crucial – but also interrogating critically the way IR is studied *inside* the West, disclosing hidden biases in the way knowledge is produced. The project of globalising IR therefore comprises two tasks. First, it must incorporate subject matter and perspectives from the non-West, giving voice to often marginalised and neglected peoples and states in the post-colonial world – both academic and non-academic voices. Second, it must reflect on the intellectual assumptions, concepts and categories that shape how international relations are studied in the West. To globalise IR, then, is to

‘provincialise’ a predominantly Western IR, to borrow the language of post-colonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000). It is to show that the West’s experiences are not universal and their examples are not necessarily ideals or norms to which the rest of the world should aspire.

This is not to imply that Western scholarship has been completely oblivious to the intellectual and political interests of the non-Western worlds. It has drawn sympathetic attention to the interests and plight of non-Western peoples. For example, in the late 1970s, [critical theorist](#) Robert Cox (1979) examined calls emanating from the global South for a ‘new international economic order’ – a project to radically restructure the world economy to eradicate injustice and unequal terms of trade. In the 1980s, the [English School](#) theorist Hedley Bull (1984) described a ‘revolt against the West’ – an [anti-colonial](#) movement of developing states demanding political independence, sovereign equality, racial equality, economic justice and cultural liberation – that challenged the colonial structures and legacies of international society (see [Chapter 19](#)). Finally, a more radical critique of IR theory was offered by R.B.J. Walker (1981), who argued that IR was essentially a European or Western tradition of thought. ‘While grasping at a global or universal phenomenon,’ Walker (1981: 196) stated, IR ‘does so almost entirely within one culturally and intellectually circumscribed perspective’.

A number of recent studies, however, have revealed that IR is a ‘not so international discipline’ (Wæver 1998b), dominated by Anglo-American scholarship and Western forms of knowledge (Acharya and Buzan 2012; Tickner and Wæver 2009a; Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. 2016). These recent studies have drawn attention to non-Western IR as a source of post-colonial thought (Seth 2011; Shilliam 2011a) and what Ole Wæver and Arlene Tickner (2009) call alternative ‘geocultural epistemologies’. The effort to recognise and present non-Western IR faces two challenges. One is to discard the expectation that non-

Western theories or knowledge of the international should resemble or be modelled on dominant Western theories (Tickner and Blaney [2012](#)). The other is to overcome [Eurocentrism](#) – the belief or worldview that the people, ideas, civilisation and history of Europe constitute the dynamic centre of world history and the ideal or norm against which non-Europeans are to be measured. Only then can we begin to uncover non-Western knowledge of the international and globalise IR. In other words, turning the discipline's attention to non-Western modes of theorising should also encourage greater self-reflection on the ways in which scholars in the West theorise. It should 'decentre' or 'provincialise' the West (Tickner and Blaney [2012](#): 2), and encourage more sensitive treatment of the myriad colonial contexts that inform non-Western modes of theorising and practising international relations (Grovoqui [2006](#); Seth [2014](#); Shilliam [2011b](#)).

IR may present the impression that it is a global discipline, but the dominance of Western academic practices and scholars suggest that there is much more work to do for it to shed its Eurocentric and Western biases and give proper recognition to non-Western forms of knowledge (see Brigg and Graham on indigeneity and IR in [Chapter 19](#)).

## **Changing agendas: Theory and practice**

Since its inception, IR has continued to evolve, largely in reflection of changing political circumstances. This final section outlines some of the ways in which the study of international relations has changed over time. First, recent developments in International Relations theory are set in the context of what has been referred to as the 'third debate'. My purpose here is not to provide a comprehensive account of the theoretical scene (that is provided in [Chapter 1](#)), but merely to indicate how the theory and history chapters in [Parts 1](#) and [2](#)

respectively relate to the ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ agendas comprising [Parts 3](#) and [4](#) respectively. Second, I sketch the ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ agendas of international relations. My argument is not that the ‘new’ agenda displaces or renders obsolete the ‘traditional’; rather, the two agendas exist alongside one another, intersecting in complex ways that require further study.

### **The ‘critical turn’ against the ‘Great Divide’**

The mainstream approaches of realism and liberalism have been instrumental in shaping the ‘traditional’ agenda (see [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#)). This should come as no surprise, given the discipline’s liberal and predominantly Anglo-American origins in the [interwar years](#) (see [Chapter 9](#)) and realism’s rise to prominence during the [Cold War](#) (see [Chapter 10](#)). In many respects, the interwar and Cold War years set the context for both the theory and practice of international relations for the twentieth century. In any case, coming to terms with international history is indispensable to grasping international relations today. This is the purpose of [Part 2](#): to introduce students to some of the major actors and events that have shaped the intellectual and practical concerns of the discipline across the twentieth century and to the present.

The first point to note about both realism and liberalism is that they tend to accept the terms of the ‘Great Divide’, and to naturalise the ‘anarchy problematique’. They view the domestic and international realms as distinct and mutually exclusive. Both also tend to take the state for granted as a form of political community, even if liberals are more likely to acknowledge the threat that states pose to their own citizens. Liberalism, after all, emerged as a critical intervention against the disturbing concentration of state power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Liberalism and realism diverge, however, over questions of war and law. Realists and liberals both deplore war as a tragic and destructive phenomenon, but how they explain war varies. Realists see war as an inevitable and ineradicable part of international relations insofar as the condition of anarchy prevails (Waltz [1959](#)). Liberals accept this description, but believe that change is possible. They argue that institutional change at the level of the state and the [international system](#) will release potentials for eradicating, or at the very least considerably limiting, war. In essence, liberals argue that the key to achieving perpetual peace is to transform the international realm so that it comes to resemble the domestic realm. Realists reject this ‘domestic analogy’ (see Suganami [1989](#)), being sceptical that international anarchy can be transformed into an international hierarchy where some kind of global sovereign exercises power *and* authority. Liberals, on the other hand, believe the spread of liberal [democracy](#) will result in the strengthening of international organisations and the rule of international law, which will mitigate the worst aspects of anarchy and contribute to the ‘domestication’ of the global system.

The ‘critical turn’ in international relations posed a challenge to both realism and liberalism for taking the world more or less as it is, ‘with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given frame of action’ (Cox [1981](#): 128). One of the pioneering scholars of critical theory, Robert Cox identified liberalism and realism (especially in their ‘neo’ versions) with ‘problem-solving’ theory. Problem-solving theories work within the present limits of the system to smooth over instabilities or problems (Cox [1981](#): 129); they tend to work in favour of stabilising prevailing structures of world order and their accompanying inequalities of wealth and power. Cox’s main point is that problem-solving theories like realism and liberalism fail to reflect on the prior framework within

which they theorise (see [Box 4.2](#)). The upshot is that they tend to be conservative, notwithstanding their claims to objective or value-free analysis.

By contrast, critical theories (including, for the moment, Marxism, [feminism](#), postmodernism, critical theory and sometimes [constructivism](#) –see Chapters 4–7) start from the premise that ‘theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose’ (Cox [1981](#): 128). All knowledge, according to critical theorists, is coloured by social, cultural and ideological influence, and it is vital to reveal the effect of this conditioning and any inherent biases. Critical theories of international relations, then, seek to bring to consciousness latent assumptions, interests and purposes that give rise to and orient thinking about international relations. Refusing to take the present system as normal or natural, they explore the possibilities of [emancipation](#) by forming more inclusionary political communities committed to principles of dialogue and procedural justice (see Linklater [1998](#), [2007](#)). To put the point slightly differently, critical theories are constructivist insofar as they take the prevailing structures of world order to be human creations sustained through patterned social practices. If they are constructed, then they can be transformed into less violent, more just structures of world order. Critical theories, with the possible exception of constructivism (see Shapcott [2000](#): 154), place emancipation at the centre of their approach. They are all, to an extent, children of the Enlightenment, as are theorists of global justice (see [Chapter 8](#)). The knowledge they seek makes no claims to being objective or value-free. Instead, they offer a politically and ethically charged account of international relations, one aimed at expanding human freedom and global justice by radically transforming the prevailing structures of world order (see [Table 4.1](#)).

In questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, critical theories compel us to reflect on the ‘Great Divide’. There is broad agreement among Marxism, critical theory, feminism, constructivism, postmodernism and global justice theories that

the distinction between inside and outside, hierarchy and anarchy is by no means natural or necessary; rather, it is a socially and historically constructed device for organising political life in a particular way – one that, in empowering sovereign states to pursue self-interest through power politics, disempowers and renders invisible social classes, women and the excluded in general. The ‘Great Divide’ also functions to reproduce the logics of self-help and power politics in international relations. As Alexander Wendt ([1992](#)) has persuasively argued, however, ‘anarchy is what states make of it’ (see [Box 7.1](#)). His point is that anarchy (the absence of an over-arching authority) does not occur naturally or independently of states and their practices. If anarchy resembles a self-help, power-political system, it is because states choose policies that make it so.

### **From states, war and law to globalisation and global governance**

The ‘Great Divide’ sets up the study of international relations in a particular way – it points us towards certain issues and assumptions, and away from others. In particular, it points us towards the ‘traditional’ agenda of ‘high politics’, where diplomatic and strategic issues take centre stage. States become the principal actors and focus is concentrated on issues pertaining to their external relations: issues of [nationalism](#), security, [arms control](#), war, [diplomacy](#) and great power relations (see Chapters 13–16 and [20–21](#)). But law has always been an important part of the traditional agenda, too. From the discipline’s founding, realists and liberals have long studied the relationship of states with international law (see [Chapter 18](#)), with liberals tending to put their faith in law as a force for peace and realists tending to be sceptical of the idea that a law not backed by force can make a difference. For realists, international law may lack coercive force, but it is important nonetheless because, as the great French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau ([\[c. 1756\] 1917](#): 125) noted, ‘on every side the strong [are] armed with

the terrible powers of the Law against the weak'. In other words, law (domestic or international) serves political functions and can be manipulated in precisely this manner by powerful actors. The branch of international law concerned with war has also been a constant feature of the traditional agenda (see [Chapter 17](#)), and is even more important in the current context of the global 'war on terror' (see [Chapter 29](#)).

We should not conclude, therefore, that the subject matter of the 'traditional' agenda is in any way obsolete. It will only become obsolete when sovereign states disappear and when war is eradicated. So long as these conditions are not in prospect, we would do well to reflect on the continuing relevance of states, war and law. The key question, as prompted by the 'critical turn', is whether the traditional agenda contains all the necessary intellectual resources to make sense of the contemporary politics of states, war and law in international relations. Does the traditional agenda pose all the right questions, or is it necessary to rethink and re-pose some of these questions, perhaps by drawing on intellectual resources afforded by the 'critical turn'? Is the traditional agenda sufficiently global in outlook, or does it reflect the concepts and interests of the West?

What is excluded from the traditional agenda is everything associated with 'domestic' or 'low politics' – everything that does not fit neatly into the agenda of states, war and law. Issues relegated to the margins include economics and the environment, morality and religion, and a range of [non-state actors](#) from refugees to terrorists, from multinational corporations (MNCs) to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Incorporating such issues and actors into the traditional agenda would effectively collapse the 'Great Divide'; it would dissolve international relations into world politics. Critical theorists and postmodernists have argued for just this move (R.B.J. Walker [1995](#)); they tend to reject or at least cast doubt on the 'Great Divide'. From their perspective, the

task is not to maintain disciplinary insularity, but to reflect on whether it is tenable any longer to suppose a 'Great Divide'. Especially in the context of globalisation, it has become more urgent to ask whether it is still adequate to conceive of international relations as a completely separate realm of politics from domestic politics (Clark [1999](#)).

[Part 4](#), The new agenda: Globalisation and global governance, covers many topics that do not sit comfortably with the 'Great Divide'. These topics can generally be included under the heading 'Globalisation and global governance'. Both these topics have spawned large industries of scholarly research – especially globalisation. An essentially contested term, globalisation has been defined by David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathon Perraton ([1999](#): 15) as the 'widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness' made possible by new information, communication and transportation technologies. As a multidimensional phenomenon, globalisation holds different – sometimes contradictory – implications for international relations (Devetak [2008](#)). At the same time as it promises global interconnectedness, cosmopolitan community and secular modernity (see [Chapter 24](#)), it results in the fracturing of states and the rise of virulent forms of ethno-nationalism and religious [fundamentalism](#). At the same time as it enables prosperous individuals to travel across the globe, it casts asylum seekers into a precarious 'frontierland' (Bauman [1998](#)), beyond the safety of international law (see [Chapter 33](#)). At the same time as it promises prosperity and peace, it also enables transnational terrorists to deploy violence to their own ends (see [Chapter 29](#)).

Globalisation has also given rise to actors and institutions concerned to regulate world politics through a combination of 'public' and 'private' organisations. Global governance is not the same as global government; it refers, as James Rosenau ([1992](#): 4) says, to a global system of rule that rests on a blend

of formal and informal authorities, officially sanctioned laws and tacit norms. On the formal side, we have international organisations like the United Nations (UN) (see [Chapter 22](#)) and the [World Trade Organization](#). On the informal side, we have ‘private’ authorities (such as credit-rating agencies), which operate at the global level to monitor and regulate financial activities of states (see [Chapter 26](#)), and international [non-governmental organisations](#) (INGOs), which also operate at the global level in assisting states and international organisations in the provision of ‘global public goods’ (see [Chapter 25](#)).

Crucial elements in the contemporary architecture of global governance are global economic institutions (GEIs) like the [World Bank](#), [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) and World Trade Organization, which generally lie outside the traditional parameters of realist theories of international relations because they are thought to be marginal to the ‘high politics’ issues of strategy and diplomacy. Yet GEIs continue to exercise, controversially, a great deal of influence over countries of the global South (see [Chapters 25](#) and [27](#)). Debate continues about the power of these institutions to regulate the global economy and in whose interests they do so. These debates feed into more general discontent with globalisation ([Chapter 28](#)).

If the traditional agenda focuses on the system of states, the new agenda recognises the growing influence of global or transnational actors, structures and processes. If the traditional agenda downgrades ideas and norms to material considerations of power, the new agenda frequently plays up the power of ideas and norms. This is clear in the rising prominence of religion, human rights, [refugees](#) and the environment on the agenda of global politics (see [Chapters 24](#), 32–35); all are issues of global scope (transnational issues that cross state borders), and all are irreducible to material sources of power. These issues also tend to raise moral considerations (what are our obligations?). It is on this basis that [humanitarianism](#) has flourished in recent decades. Organisations such as

Oxfam, Amnesty International, Doctors without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) and the International Committee of the Red Cross make it their business to assist humans in need around the globe. Since the 1990s, arguments have even been made that humanitarianism must be prepared to use force if suffering strangers are to be saved (see [Chapter 31](#)).

It is arguable that the ‘critical turn’ and the rise of a ‘new’ agenda have turned the world of international relations into a different place. It is not only that the ‘furniture’ of the world is different (state as well as a variety of non-state actors, the states-system as well as transnational networks populate this world); our understanding of these actors, networks, structures and processes also changes. They are no longer seen as clearly defined or fixed objects in an external world of material power relations; rather, they are seen as contested objects constructed by a range of material and non-material (‘ideational’) social, political, legal, economic and religious practices. The things of this world are imbued with meaning and value by humans and their social relations, and insofar as they are socially constructed, they are susceptible to modification and change (see [Chapters 4](#) and [7](#)). But change need not involve large-scale violence. The Cold War ended peacefully, and authoritarian regimes across Eastern Europe (Georgia’s 2003 ‘Rose Revolution’, Ukraine’s 2004–05 ‘Orange Revolution’) and the Arab world (Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011) have been overthrown through largely peaceful popular uprisings. The difficulty establishing stable, durable, pacified political societies in the aftermath of civil or international war has been shown to be enormous (for example, Iraq and Syria at present).

Indeed, change itself has become a more prominent feature of International Relations. It is not just that change emanates from the new agenda, however; traditional agenda issues such as war are equally disposed to change as actors (other than states’ armed forces) engage in organised violence, adopting tactics of [guerrilla warfare](#) and [terrorism](#), and applying new technologies that can

transform war. In the context of some [civil wars](#) in the 1990s, scholars such as Mary Kaldor ([1999](#)) argued that ‘new wars’ had arisen in places like the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone that did not fit the usual understanding. In the context of the global ‘war on terror’, the United States argued for changes to international law and the laws of war in order to fight terrorism more effectively.

These examples suggest that the ‘Great Divide’ is not nearly as clear cut as formerly imagined. Domestic hierarchy and the state’s monopoly over the instruments of violence have been undone, leaving citizens insecure and uncertain about who their friends are when wars of ethno-nationalism break out. In some respects, the domestic comes to acquire traits of the international realm. At the same time, the gradual development and consolidation of global governance suggests that international relations may be approximating the domestic realm in some important respects. In the final analysis, the rise of the new agenda and the critical turn suggest that the ‘Great Divide’ should not be taken for granted.

## Conclusion

This Introduction has tried to show the fascinating history and the complex dynamics and limitations that shape international relations, making it such an exciting area to study. Continuity and change, theory and history, traditional and new agendas define the field of International Relations today. It is important to note, however, that the ‘new’ agenda does not replace or supplant the ‘traditional’ agenda: it *supplements* it. The traditional agenda is necessary, if insufficient, to understanding or explaining international relations *or* world politics today. True, the prevention of war remains as urgent today as it was in

1919, but the character of war has changed dramatically since then, and we must study these and other differences as well as the things that remain the same.

The two agendas (traditional and new) exist alongside each other – although not without tension. The task for IR students today is to grasp how these agendas interact, and this cannot be achieved independently of historical understanding, or relying on a parochial outlook. IR must be globalised if it is to comprehend the diverse experiences and understandings of international relations. This textbook is designed to introduce you to both agendas and to show you the continuing vitality of the traditional agenda and the emergence of novel features of the new agenda that demand global, theoretical and historical perspectives.

## **Discussion questions**

**0.1** What should be studied under the heading ‘international relations’?

**0.2** Should the discipline’s founding premises and purposes still govern the study of International Relations? What, if anything, should be the purpose of studying International Relations?

**0.3** Does what Ian Clark calls the ‘Great Divide’ still pertain in contemporary world politics?

**0.4** What does it mean to globalise IR? Why should it be globalised?

**0.5** Does the ‘new’ agenda adequately capture the changes in recent international relations?

**0.6** Which theory or theories can provide most insight into past and present international relations?

## *Further reading*

Armitage, David 2013, *Foundations of modern international thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *A rich, wide-ranging account of the early modern political thought that gave shape to modern international relations.*

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Doyle, Michael 1997, *Ways of war and peace: Realism, liberalism and socialism*, New York: WW Norton. *An impressive account of realism, liberalism and socialism's intellectual contributions to the study of international relations.*

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George, Jim 1994, *Discourses of global politics: A critical (re)introduction to international relations*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. *The most important book published in the context of the 'third great debate'; captures the complexity of the discipline.*

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Reus-Smit, Christian and Snidal, Duncan (eds) 2008, *The Oxford handbook of international relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A major reference book that provides an invaluable account of the 'state of the art' of IR.*

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Smith, Steve, Booth, Ken and Zalewski, Marysia (eds) 1996, *International theory: Positivism and beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Still a valuable overview of the discipline on the 75th anniversary of the Department of Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.*

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Tickner, Arlene B. and Wæver, Ole (eds) 2009, *International relations scholarship around the world: Worlding beyond the West*, London: Routledge. *A comprehensive collection surveying the state of IR scholarship beyond the West.*

## Part 1



# Theories of International Relations

### [1 International Relations theory in an age of critical diversity](#)

*Jim George*

### [2 Liberalism](#)

*James L. Richardson*

### [3 Realism](#)

*Michele Chiaruzzi*

### [4 Marxism and critical theory](#)

*Jim George, Richard Devetak and Martin Weber*

### [5 Feminism](#)

*Katrina Lee-Koo*

### [6 Postmodernism](#)

*Roland Bleiker*

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*Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Joshua S. Jones*

**8** [Theories of global justice](#)

*Richard Shapcott*

# International Relations theory in an age of critical diversity



**Jim George**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter introduces students to the range of theoretical perspectives and issues that have animated the study of international relations through the years. First, it explains why theoretical reflection is indispensable to explaining and

understanding international relations. Second, it addresses unavoidable ontological and epistemological issues in the quest for theoretical understanding. Third, it traces the growth of mainstream International Relations theory. Finally, it analyses the rise of diverse critical approaches to the study of international relations.

## **The necessity of theory**

Attitudes toward ‘theory’ vary among students of International Relations (IR). Some are wary of it, some are frightened of it and some are hostile to it. Theory, it is often proclaimed, is too difficult, too abstract or irrelevant to the real world. Thankfully, these attitudes are changing as IR students in the twenty-first century embrace the theoretical challenges of IR and become aware of sophisticated debates concerning the role of theory in understanding and explaining the real world of which they speak and in which they live. These debates illustrate that theorising is not something one can choose to avoid; rather, in the process of giving meaning to the things, people, events and controversies in the world, we are engaged in a theoretical process – explicitly or otherwise.

In particular, we cannot simply observe the everyday world of international relations without giving theoretical meaning to what we are seeing. And in this process of observation, we might well bestow different meanings on the same event, as we theorise these ‘real-world’ things in different ways. For example, when we see governments in the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia ramping up their political and strategic responses to Russian ‘expansionist’ inclinations in Eastern Europe and/or similarly perceived Chinese activities in the South China Sea, how are we to make meaningful judgements of these

actions? Is this a prudent and justifiable strategy in the face of an otherwise growing threat to Western global interests, or a series of shallow and short-sighted responses to historical and geostrategic complexities likely to enhance anti-Western sentiments and accelerate the very attitudes and behaviours they seek to deter?

Rarely are the questions of contemporary international relations as clear cut as this. Nor is it generally a simple case of either/or when it comes to the machinations of actors on the international scene. More often than not, we are concerned with multiple shades of grey when making judgements about complex foreign policy and security issues. But the point is clear enough: when one seeks to explain something in the real world of international relations, it is never enough to just 'look at the facts', because the facts – in this case, concerning major policy decisions on the nature and strategic intent of Putin's Russia or Xi Jinping's China – can be accorded a range of different meanings, depending on how they are understood, processed and prioritised, and depending, more precisely, on the theoretical frame of reference one brings to them.

Nevertheless, we still have to make judgements about such issues. Indeed, as members of the international community, it is imperative that we do so. We have to be aware, however, that our judgements do not rest on some infallible foundation of absolute correctness, but instead on a process of theoretically framing the world that provides 'correct' cognitive and political meaning for us. This need not lead to either philosophical or political relativism. It is not good enough to conclude that because there might be no single, irreducible way of understanding the political world, we need not bother thinking seriously about where we stand on important contemporary issues. On the contrary, because our thinking, social behaviour and political judgement are not determined by absolute categories of truth or reality, we must think increasingly seriously about

the theorised truths and reality that provide the political and ethical foundations on which we base our lives.

Our task as students of international relations is to become increasingly aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the theorised positions we take – to acknowledge that these positions are, by definition, never beyond question, never closed to greater knowledge as we experience a volatile, changing world. This chapter seeks to help in developing this awareness. It seeks to illustrate that studying International Relations theory is an exciting and stimulating experience that engages a range of difficult but crucial questions about human knowledge, political power and possible global futures. These questions traditionally have been about ‘man, the state and war’ (Waltz [1959](#)), but they have now been rearticulated and refocused to include questions of community, religion, culture, global poverty, terrorism, gender, refugees, social justice and the environment in a complex contemporary world. Ultimately, they are questions about who we are, what we stand for and how we should live and engage with others in the twenty-first century.

To begin to adequately address questions such as these, one needs to go beyond a simple ‘current affairs’ approach to international relations in order to both understand the development of theory since the institutionalisation of the IR discipline in 1919 (see Introduction) and to understand those areas of intellectual and political contention that have helped accelerate the current era of critical diversity in International Relations theory – particularly the contention concerning questions of scientific knowledge and international relations. This is necessary because, since the early days of the IR discipline, scholars have debated the validity of scientific knowledge as a keystone of certainty on the issues of theoretical contention touched on above. It is in this context that questions of [ontology](#) and [epistemology](#) need to be examined.

## **Ontology, epistemology and the science question in International Relations theory**

At least formally, ontology is the theory of 'being'. It is concerned with what one perceives as the fundamental elements of the world. Epistemology is the theory of 'knowing'; it is concerned with the question of how we come to know what we know about these fundamental elements. From this position, we can make decisions about our methodological and theoretical preferences – how we illustrate that our ontological premise is correct.

Kant's liberal ontology, for example, maintains that self-creating individuals are the fundamental elements of the social world. He 'knows' this, and seeks to illustrate it by reference to a progressivist history in which the rational and moral capacities of individuals increasingly are expressed in liberal-democratic social formations. Realists 'see' the world differently because their ontological and epistemological positions direct their image of reality in a different way. Their ontological position arguably has the same focus – individuals – but not of the [Kantian](#) variety. Instead, the realist individual is driven by a lust for power and the relentless pursuit of security. Realists also 'know' this by reference to history – this time the history of the anarchical states-system. Thus epistemologically realists concentrate on states and a history of 'recurrence and repetition' rather than of progressive developmental change.

It is via this 'metatheoretical' (see [Box 1.1](#)) process that Kantian liberals and their realist counterparts make their theoretical claims to real knowledge. Both have coherent and cogent ways of illustrating their case, and both point to 'history' as the vehicle for their knowledge of reality, yet they are substantially different. What, then, is the truth of the matter? And how is judgement to be made about this truth?

### **Box 1.1:** Terminology

#### **Key terms in the philosophy of science**

***Ontology:*** theories about the nature of being. It asks: What is there in the world? What is the character of the things that make up the ‘furniture’ of the world?

***Epistemology:*** theories of knowledge. It asks: Are our knowledge claims valid? How do we justify our knowledge claims?

***Metatheory:*** the study of the deep ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying theories of being and knowledge.

***Methodology:*** the study of ways (methods) of producing or attaining knowledge. It asks: What are the best conceptual tools for producing knowledge about international relations?

These were the kinds of questions that led to the search for a science of IR – for a process by which different knowledge claims could be transformed into a single scientifically established knowledge form, a body of objectively gleaned knowledge generated via methods of the natural sciences. This issue was integral to the early realist–idealist debate in the 1920s and 1930s (the so-called ‘first great debate’), and in the 1950s and 1960s it was an issue of stark contention between the mainly American behaviouralists and their traditionalist critics (the so-called ‘second great debate’). It was also at the core of the disputes (broadly)

between positivists and anti-positivists that characterised ‘the third great debate’ in IR during the 1990s and that has remained integral to IR theory debates since.

It is important to note that the focus of criticism here was never science per se but, ironically, the *anti-scientific* tendencies of positivism that, its critics argue, misrepresents and/or ignores some of the most sophisticated insights of scientific thinking since the 1920s – particularly from the field of quantum physics (see [Box 1.2](#)).

### **Box 1.2: Terminology**

#### **Positivism and scientific International Relations**

[Positivism](#) utilises empiricist epistemology. [Empiricism](#) maintains that only observable facts – facts that can be scientifically validated to create a knowledge base for IR analogous to the natural sciences – should form the basis of ‘real’ knowledge. This strict empiricist line has been the norm in ‘scientific’ IR, but it has not been adopted by all positivists. Outside the study of IR, German theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg ([1961](#):20) has questioned the universal applicability of empiricism: ‘In atomic physics observations can no longer be objectified ... The science of nature does not deal with nature itself but in fact with the science of nature as man thinks it and describes it.’

The point is that the shift from seventeenth-century Newtonian physics to twentieth-century quantum physics brought a shift from a science based on

observable things to a science based on unobservable things – a science of sub-atomic particles as the new building blocks of existence, the new ontological foundations of ‘being’. Because they are not directly available to the senses, these building blocks cannot be ‘observed’ in any direct or objective manner; they thus defy the empiricist epistemology of positivism.

The significance of all this for contemporary IR is that it severely problematises positivist approaches to science while maintaining a healthy respect for the scientific enterprise per se that, at its best, proposes that there *are* facts and truths and realities in the world – but that these facts are always contingent, and that these truths and realities are always infused with theoretical and interpretive dimensions. There is no room in this scientific enterprise for intellectual closure, no room for dogmatic insistence about a single, universal truth and/or a single unchangeable and unchallengeable reality. There is no room either for the notion that theory is divorced from, or irrelevant to, the ‘real world’.

This kind of scientific insight has been rare in mainstream IR circles, but it has had significant influence within a range of critical international relations theories, and we will touch on this influence shortly.

## **Mainstream International Relations theory**

For now, suffice it to say that the debate over scientific knowledge underpinned the more immediate concerns of early IR scholars in 1919 as they sought to explain the reasons for the carnage of World War I and find ways to avoid such mayhem in the future. In the early years of the discipline, a liberal perspective, exemplified in the neo-Kantianism of US President Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), dominated IR; it was a perspective that urged a new world order

based on individual liberty and the rule of law, capitalist free trade, scientific progress and the establishment of liberal institutions of crisis management, such as the League of Nations and the International Court of Justice.

But as the mood again darkened during the years of Depression and rising ideological extremism, realists attacked liberalism as dangerously [utopian](#) in the face of extreme danger. E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* ([1946](#)) is the literary exemplar in this regard. Carr was scathing about a perceived 'idealism' at the core of Wilsonian liberalism at a time of looming catastrophe, and about liberal theory generally in an international environment more realistically understood in terms of the logics and strategies of traditional power politics.

This dichotomised frame of reference (realism versus idealism) has arguably become Carr's major legacy to IR scholarship. A more appropriate legacy would acknowledge *The Twenty Years' Crisis* as an extraordinarily insightful commentary on inter-war international relations as [fascism](#) threatened; as an early attempt to deal with some complex theoretical issues that were not seriously revisited by the discipline of IR until fifty years later; and as a work that indicated something of what realism and liberalism represent, at their best and at their worst.

At its best, realism reminds us that the international environment is invariably dangerous and volatile, and that in such an environment the use of violence is sometimes necessary to counter the violent intent of others; rational debate is sometimes not enough to deter this violent intent. At its best, realism reminds us of something else too: that the use of force should be sanctioned only as a last resort, when national security and/or fundamental values are threatened; that rules of proportionality be applied; that the safety and rights of non-combatants be strictly observed. And at its best realism uses power as a 'means' to an ordered and relatively peaceful 'end' – not as an end in itself.

Liberalism, at its best, reminds us that even in a world of danger and violent intent there can be realistic alternatives to force projection as a means of maintaining international order. Liberalism reminds us that ideas – of freedom and democracy and individual dignity and human rights – are not just abstractions, but have real concrete significance in the changes that have shaped the modern world, inspiring progressive change for many millions of people over the past few centuries, and also inspiring social [emancipation](#) in the face of seemingly overwhelming structures of violence and oppression. At its best, liberalism does not ignore the fact of violent conflict but refuses to reduce the human condition to the perceived dictates of an anarchical system of states, insisting instead on the power and persuasiveness of international law (see [Chapter 18](#)) and of the humanitarian instinct (see [Chapter 31](#)).

After World War II, however, increasingly crude variants of realism (and liberalism) came to dominate the IR agenda as the intellectual and strategic focus of the discipline became the Cold War, with International Relations theory increasingly focused on American Cold War interests and perspectives. During this period, Hans Morgenthau (1904–80) became the emblematic American realist, with his *Politics Among Nations* ([1973](#)), first published in 1948, largely framing the agenda for generations of students and policy-makers during the Cold War.

At the core of this agenda was Morgenthau's contention that the struggle for power is the fundamental political fact of all IR. It is a struggle that determines the foreign policy behaviour of all states (as they pursue their '[national interest](#) defined as power') in an anarchical system. This leads to a second major proposition: that the pursuit of power by all states in the system is an 'objective law' of international relations. The superiority of realist theory, consequently, is that it is 'governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature' (Morgenthau [1973](#): 5).

Elsewhere, Morgenthau makes clear the need for realist policy-makers to take into account specific historical and political factors in making judgements about the workings of these ‘objective laws’. As had happened with Carr’s work, however, the ambiguity and inconsistency of Morgenthau’s attempts to answer the ‘big’ questions of international relations at a time of political crisis resulted in a number of possible interpretations of his positions, which were variously seized upon by the IR community, particularly in the United States.

Indeed, both classical and scientific realists claimed him as their own, with the latter influence helping to accelerate the movement toward the ‘scientific turn’ and positivism in American realism in particular. The former influence, meanwhile, was evident in major critiques of ‘scientific’ realism from within the realist community and beyond it, by those concerned about the nature of the positivist quest per se.

One internal critique is of special significance: Hedley Bull’s (1932–85) attack on the employment of scientific method in IR. Bull’s ([1966](#)) intervention is important because it indicates that realism is a much more theoretically nuanced perspective than it is sometimes given credit for. Although Bull was an Australian his work increased the profile of the so-called ‘English School’ of IR, an approach which remains significant to the present day, particularly in the UK and Australia.

There is contention surrounding precisely what the English School approach stands for (see [Box 19.2](#)). In its early manifestations, it appeared a kind of gentrified realism in comparison to the harder-edged American variant. It has developed into rather more than this, and Bull’s works indicated this potential (see his *The Anarchical Society*, [1977](#); see also Dunne [1998](#), [2007](#); Linklater and Suganami [2006](#)). It suggests that a rudimentary ‘international society’ operates in the realist ‘anarchical’ sphere, which sees states and other actors dealing with their clashes of interests not just by resort to war or aggressive [alliance](#)-building,

but also by recourse to agreed-upon social norms and regulations, and the processes of international law.

**Table 1.1** Mainstream International Relations theories

Theories	Theorists
Realism	E.H. Carr, Hans J. Morgenthau
Liberalism	Michael Doyle, Richard Rosecrance
Neorealism	Kenneth Waltz, John Mearsheimer
Neoliberalism	Robert O. Keohane, Andrew Moravcsik
English School	Martin Wight, Hedley Bull

This does not add up to liberal internationalism. The English School approach repudiates the progressivism intrinsic to liberal IR thinking while positively engaging with some of its major concerns, such as human rights and questions of justice in the international system (Vincent [1986](#)) – concerns, it stresses, that cannot adequately be addressed in value-free scientific terms.

Following the Vietnam War (1964–73), the critiques of mainstream IR went well beyond English School perspectives. The breakdown of the [Bretton Woods](#) system in the 1970s and the development of an unregulated global marketplace (represented as neoliberalism since the 1980s) only enhanced the sense that neither mainstream realism nor liberalism had the capacity to deal with the changing nature of an international agenda where questions of poverty, justice and human rights increasingly were perceived as first-order issues.

An important critical theme became more evident at this time, one which proposed that the inadequacies of IR realism and liberalism resided in their

location on two sides of the same historical and cultural coin, a conjunction that resulted in many peoples, cultures and interests being excluded from orthodox IR narratives that failed to adequately acknowledge the experiences of a multi-faceted, multi-ethnic, multi-religious world – a world where Western theory and practice might no longer dominate in the future.

This critical pace accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to the emergence of [neorealism](#) and [neoliberalism](#) as the mainstream answers to its challengers – answers that reasserted realist notions about structural imperatives and unchangeable principles of anarchy (Waltz [1979](#); Mearsheimer [2007](#)), and that reiterated the individualistic free-trade mantras of liberalism as the universalistic basis for prosperity and peace in a new age of economic globalisation (Friedman [1999](#); Rosow and George [2015](#): Chapter 2).

There are differences between the ‘neos’ (Lamy [2005](#)), but it has been their similarities that have most concerned their critics, and it has been the consequent conceptual and thematic narrowness of the mainstream agenda that has been a catalyst for much of the diversity in International Relations theory since the 1990s.

## **The era of critical diversity**

The ongoing nature of this critical enterprise was evident enough in a 2015 condemnation of mainstream IR thinking deemed to have justified and legitimated the structural violence suffered by the ‘losers’ of the contemporary world order, in particular women, post-colonial societies and those most disempowered by neoliberal globalisation (Dingli [2015](#)). Critically inclined liberals share these concerns particularly regarding neorealism’s militaristic orientations and neoliberalism’s economic strategies. Neoliberalism, it is

proposed, is actually designed to enhance the power and prosperity of the global North, whatever its rhetoric about trade liberalisation and political democratisation. In so doing, it is producing a 'global apartheid' as privilege and poverty increases in the world (Falk [1999](#)); it is provoking global dissent against the geostrategic and economic status quo and encouraging various kinds of 'blowback' terrorism aimed at the major Western states and their peoples (Johnson [2000](#)). From this critical liberal perspective, consequently, IR theory and practice should be concentrating less on zealous free market doctrines and more on issues of global justice, cultural pluralism, human rights and the alleviation of poverty (see [Chapters 2 and 8](#) and George [2004](#)).

Marxists, of course, have been concentrating on the relationship between the global rich and poor for many years. And while Marxism ([Chapter 4](#)) was effectively silenced in mainstream IR during the Cold War, there is now a renewed interest in what Marx had to say about inequality and injustice in a globalised capitalist system. Much of the critical challenge from this quarter has come from neo-Marxist perspectives, with the works of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) particularly important in prompting a range of contemporary alternatives to the IR mainstream in recent years (see [Chapter 4](#)). Central to this literature is the notion of hegemony developed by Gramsci in the 1920s and 1930s, which sought to reformulate orthodox Marxist accounts of (direct) ruling class domination in terms of a more subtle process of cultural and cognitive persuasion where ruling class ideas are 'naturalised' in ostensibly neutral social spaces (e.g. schools, universities, churches, the liberal media). The result, it's argued, are politically passive and largely uncritical modern societies, that support simple 'market' solutions to complex social problems, that articulate nationalist and xenophobic attitudes rather than internationalist and humanitarian ones, and that exhibit a deep cynicism concerning the capacity or desirability of radical change in the world (Gill [2010](#) and [Chapter 4](#)).

Neo-Gramscians have sought to illustrate how an international ruling class – of states, corporations, and a variety of global economic institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and the WTO (see [Chapter 25](#)) – are indeed working to naturalise a hegemonic system of ideas and political structures designed to enhance the power and prosperity of a small minority of the world's states and peoples (Ayers [2013](#); Bieler and Morton [2004](#); Robinson [2014](#); Rupert [2003](#), [2007](#); Saull [2012](#)). Their critical focus, consequently, is on critical social movements and counter-hegemonic forces around the world seeking, in their different ways, to overcome the impact of this hegemonic power on them (Butko [2006](#); Gill [2000](#); Morton [2002](#); Rupert and Solomon [2006](#); Worth [2013](#)).

Robert Cox ([1981](#)) has added important dimensions to this project over the years by critically analysing the process by which particular ideas and structures become hegemonic in international relations. Cox explored this theme via his oft-quoted proposition that theory 'is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose' (Cox [1981](#): 128). Cox here reiterates the view that there are no neutral vantage points in International Relations theory, and suggests specifically that neorealism falsely presents itself as an objective analysis of the world 'as it really is' (see [Box 4.2](#)). It is not objective at all, Cox argues, but rather a narrow 'problem-solving' approach to theory that accepts the structural and intellectual [status quo](#), and seeks only to make the present system work more efficiently. In contrast, critical theory ([Chapter 4](#)) locates contemporary IR in a broader historical and intellectual context while investigating how various social forces impacted upon the way it came to be the way it 'is'. In this way, it indicates how emancipatory change might actually be possible in the future (Cox [1987](#)).

These themes have been central also to the works of Andrew Linklater, which resonate with critical concerns about the possibilities for an ethics of human community in the age of globalisation, about new forms of (post-nationalist) identity and about the relationship between knowledge and power in

international relations. In his *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* ([1982](#)), Linklater outlines a case for global ethical obligations alongside a philosophical critique of traditional state sovereignty. And in *Beyond Realism and Marxism* ([1990](#)), he seeks to build upon realist insights into power and anarchy and Marxist concerns for ‘universal emancipation’ beyond state boundaries. Linklater’s penetrating works on these issues have established qualitative benchmarks for critical theory scholarship in the twenty-first century.

Concerns about community, ethics and difference are integral to a range of other critical perspectives on the contemporary IR theory agenda – feminism, post-colonialism, postmodernism and constructivism among them. Intrinsic to these approaches has been an explicit concern with the power–knowledge nexus in IR.

Postmodernism gleans its primary understanding of this nexus from Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who proposed that all knowledge claims – particularly those invoking universalist stances on behalf of *the* truth about human life – are actually driven by a ‘will to power’ on the part of the claimant (see [Chapter 6](#)). This Nietzschean legacy was filtered into IR during the 1980s and 1990s, as an early ‘postmodern’ literature sought to relocate the dominant IR narratives of reality as foundationalist discourses of power (see Campbell [2007](#)). [Foundationalism](#), in this sense, represents an ontological claim to knowledge perceived as beyond challenge, beyond change, beyond social reassessment and adaptation. In particular, neorealism and neoliberalism are considered foundationalist discourses incapable of the critical self-reflection needed in a changing, volatile post-Cold War world. This theme was central to Richard Ashley’s ground-breaking metatheoretical works ([1988](#), [1989](#)) and to a range of similarly focused studies that sought to create ‘thinking space’ for analytical and policy options previously excluded from the ‘art of the possible’ in traditional IR (Der Derian and Shapiro [1989](#); Walker [1987](#)).

A second wave of postmodern IR literature has built upon these early works to more directly engage some of the crucial international relations issues of the contemporary era. Examples include works on US foreign policy (see Campbell, [1992](#); Shapiro [1988](#)); on the war in Bosnia (Campbell [1998](#)); on the tensions on the Korean peninsula (Bleiker [2005](#)); on questions of humanitarian intervention (Orford [1999](#); Edkins [2004](#)); on the global political economy (de Goede [2006](#)); and on an ethical security policy in IR (Burke [2006](#); Nyman and Burke [2016](#)).

Integral to postmodernist writings, too, has been a concern for those excluded from the dominant discourses of power politics and free-market individualism. In this sense, postmodernism shares an ethical position with critical theory and with much feminist scholarship in IR, particularly in its first-wave articulation in the 1980s and 1990s.

At the core of early feminist literature was the claim that women had systematically been excluded from the IR agenda (see [Chapter 5](#)), and more precisely, that IR theory has never been gender neutral; rather, its orthodox frame of reference rests on a deeply gendered caricature of humankind (Grant and Newland [1991](#); Tickner [1992](#)). Since the 1990s, successive waves of feminist literature have continued this assault on the gendered theories and practices of international relations.

The result has been a broad and burgeoning literature that speaks in different ways of women's lives and experiences, and that highlights women's struggles and achievements as intrinsic contributions to the everyday world of international relations (see Tickner and Sjoberg [2007](#), [2011](#); see also [Chapter 5](#)). Feminists have, moreover, sought to add important extra dimensions to core IR themes. On war and security, for example, orthodox concerns have been supplemented by works on previously marginalised security threats – concerning rape, poverty and sexual degradation (see Leatherman [2013](#); Lee-Koo [2011](#), [2008](#); Sjoberg, [2010](#); Sylvester [2013](#): 618–20; Tripp et al. [2013](#)). And on issues

of global economics, feminist scholars have focused on the particular burdens placed on women and children as, for example, the main victims of decisions taken to impose sanctions (e.g. on Iraq in the 1990s) and/or to impose structural adjustment policies upon already impoverished societies (Tickner and Sjoberg [2007](#), [2011](#)).

This flourishing feminist literature is very much an indication of the ‘age of diversity’ in IR – even more so, perhaps, with regard to a post-colonial theory that insists the voices of Africa, Asia and the Arab world, in particular, must now be heard on the IR agenda (Bahadur [2013](#); Bischoff et al. [2016](#); Dingli [2015](#); Thakur [2015](#)). The desire of these diverse peoples to speak in their own voices has particular resonance for post-colonial scholarship because of its central argument: that the voices, cultures and histories of colonised peoples have been reformulated or caricatured – or indeed erased completely – by the dominant Western powers in the modern era.

A powerful and influential dimension was added to this literature by Edward Said (1935–2003) via his notion of Orientalism (Said [1979](#)): a process, Said argued, that transformed the identities, cultures and religions of colonised peoples into simple caricatures of imperialist imagination, most often in terms that rendered them inferior to their colonial rulers and therefore susceptible to Western discipline and punishment. Post-colonialist literature thus rejects ‘imperialistic’ images of human society, and those that remain ignorant of cultural otherness, or patronising of people in the ‘poor world’ (Chowdrey and Nair [2002](#); Seth [2011](#); Thakur [2015](#)). In all of these contexts, post-colonialist IR focuses on the ‘deliberate Eurocentrism’ of both mainstream and critical theorising and argues instead for cultural inclusiveness and a toleration of difference as fundamental elements of any global approach to international relations (Thakur [2015](#): 215).

All these critical perspectives are currently making their contributions to a vibrant IR theory agenda in the twenty-first century, as is constructivism, which is arguably the most influential of the critically inclined perspectives on the current theory agenda. This is primarily because it has, in many ways, been appropriated by mainstream IR in the United States (see [Chapter 7](#)). Importantly, this has allowed constructivists to help broaden and deepen American IR thinking, in particular on issues of power, identity and rationality, and most famously on anarchy – which, as Alexander Wendt ([1992](#)) has put it, ‘is what states make of it’.

Wendt here is not simply wishing anarchy away in an idealist fashion, but underlining the point that nothing in international relations exists independently of the meanings and practices of social actors. This has significant implications for the ways in which the behaviour of states, global organisations and individual actors might be understood, and constructivist writings have explored these possibilities in works on the ideas, norms, rules and meanings that constitute everyday theory and practice in international relations (Kratochwil [1989](#); Onuf [1998](#); Reus-Smit [2004](#); Wendt [1999](#)).

**Table 1.2** Critical International Relations theories

Theories	Theorists
Marxism	Fred Halliday, Immanuel Wallerstein
Critical theory	R.W. Cox, Andrew Linklater
Feminism	Cynthia Enloe, J. Anne Tickner
Postmodernism	Richard Ashley, R.B.J. Walker
Constructivism	Nicholas Onuf, Alexander Wendt
Realism	John Mears, Stephen Kocs

A good deal of this constructivism continues to utilise traditional positivist methodology – hence its popularity in the United States. Some constructivism, however, has introduced a more critical edge on issues of global peace and systemic transformation, where it has to some extent overlapped with elements of the English School (see Reus-Smit [2002](#)). It has also produced interesting responses to the notion emanating recently from some mainstream quarters that the major problems in IR theory have been solved; that intellectual tolerance and pluralism is now the norm; and therefore that the challenge of critical IR theory, in particular, is ‘dead’ – or perhaps should be (Dunne et al., [2015](#)). This is a proposition questioned from a variety of perspectives, which have pointed to a resurgence of ‘hypothesis-testing’ approaches associated with positivism rather than genuine pluralism per se (see Mearsheimer and Walt [2013](#): 428–9; Sterling-Folker [2015](#)).

Reus-Smit ([2012](#), [2013a](#)) has taken a constructivist perspective in reiterating the symbiotic relationship between IR and our theories of it. To those who urge that IR scholars concentrate on ‘concrete issues of policy and practice’ rather than ‘metatheory’, Reus-Smit ([2013a](#): 590) reminds us that while ‘one can bracket metatheoretical inquiry ... this does not free one’s work ... of metatheoretical assumptions’. Moreover, these assumptions ultimately ‘admit only *certain* forms of knowledge’ and certain ways of understanding a complex ‘concrete’ world and our approaches to policy practice Reus-Smit [2013a](#): 589, emphasis added).

This reminds us, in turn, that mainstream IR theory (including its ‘concrete’ knowledge claims) has been found wanting on some crucial issues in recent times (e.g. the end of the Cold War and 9/11) largely ‘because the world was imagined according to a single criterion for knowing’ when a more

comprehensive and profound approach to theory and practice was required (Sterling-Folker [2015](#): 40). As the twenty-first century unfolds, then, some of the great theoretical challenges remain in IR, and this helps to make it an enduringly fascinating area of study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has advanced two important propositions: first, that international relations cannot be understood independently of the theoretical frameworks that give meaning to the world; and second, that the development of IR as a discipline has seen the progressive enlargement of the theoretical imagination as a diverse range of critical theories have challenged mainstream approaches.

None of this is to suggest that the realist and liberal mainstreams have been swept away on this tide of critical diversity. In policy communities and in many areas of the IR community in general, the traditional agenda's vocabulary and lexicon of meaning still dominate. But, as a number of critical theorists have suggested, realism no longer has an analytical mortgage on the meaning of power in international relations, or on realistic understandings of its implications. Additionally, liberalism faces many challenges as it seeks to articulate a universal voice beyond the suspicion and cynicism widely held around the world as to its real meaning and intent in an age of neoliberal globalisation.

As for the critical approaches touched on here, all of them have strengths and weaknesses. All deserve respectful attention, but none of them should be accepted or advocated without rigorous scholarly inspection and contemplation. This chapter has sought to provide a frame of reference by which this process might usefully begin. You are invited now to continue this process in regard to

the more comprehensive treatments of the traditional and critical theory agendas in this text.

## Discussion questions

**1.1** Why are questions of ontology and epistemology integral to the IR theory debate?

**1.2** Why does the issue of ‘scientific’ IR theory continue to evoke major disagreement within the IR theory community?

**1.3** Carr’s ([1946](#)) *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, Morgenthau’s ([1973](#)) *Politics Among Nations* and Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics* are arguably the three major realist texts in IR theory. What does this tell us about the development of the IR discipline?

**1.4** Are neorealism and neoliberalism ‘two sides of the same coin’?

**1.5** What, if anything, are the political and analytical themes that bind together Marxism, critical theory, postmodernism, feminism, post-colonialism and constructivism?

## *Further reading*

Burchill, Scott, Linklater, Andrew, Devetak, Richard, Donnelly, Jack, Paterson, Matthew, Reus-Smit, Christian and True, Jacqui 2013, *Theories of international relations*, 5th ed., London: Palgrave. *An advanced introduction to IR theory*.

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Dunne, Tim, Kurki, Milja and Smith, Steve (eds) 2007, *International relations theories: Discipline and diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An excellent*

*introduction to IR theories.*

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George, Jim 1994, *Discourses of global politics: A critical (re)introduction to international relations*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. *A comprehensive account of both mainstream and critical theories of IR.*

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Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus 2010, *The conduct of inquiry in international relations: Philosophy of science and its implications for the study of world politics*, London: Routledge. *A lively, wide-ranging constructivist account of competing IR methods.*

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Waltz, Kenneth 1979, 'Laws and theories', in *Theory of international politics*, New York: Random House. *An unsurpassed account of neorealism's positivist approach*

## 2

# Liberalism



**James L. Richardson**

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## Introduction

This chapter discusses a political theory that has come to the fore in the IR discipline since the end of the Cold War. Understanding IR [liberalism](#) nevertheless requires acquaintance with the historical context in which the broader political arguments for freedom and toleration were first enunciated. The chapter thus provides a brief historical outline of liberalism's development before surveying some key liberal tenets and their manifestation in IR. It

concludes with a discussion of some of the challenges facing contemporary IR liberalism in the current era.

## Liberalism

Liberalism is often seen as the characteristic political philosophy of the modern West. Its central principles – freedom, (human) rights, reason, progress, toleration – and the norms of [constitutionalism](#) and [democracy](#) are deeply embedded in Western political culture. Nonetheless, liberal theories of IR were until recently disdained as [utopian](#) by IR scholars no less than by diplomats. The two World Wars and the [Cold War](#) seemed to bear out the realist thesis that the international milieu was inevitably subject to the harsh imperatives of [power politics](#).

For a while after the Cold War, however, the world suddenly looked quite different. There was no hostile power threatening the liberal democracies, major interstate [war](#) seemed unthinkable and the international economy was organised in accordance with the norms of the liberal market (Friedman [1999](#); Fukuyama [1989](#)). The predominant school of liberal IR theory, most strongly represented in the United States, concentrated almost exclusively on this moment of liberal triumph, invoking the insights of democratic peace theory (DPT), US-led institutionalism and the transformative power of the global marketplace as intrinsic to winning the Cold War (Doyle, [1983](#), [1986](#); Friedman [1999](#); Fukuyama, [1989](#); Kegley, [1993](#); Keohane, [1984](#)).

In more recent times, this scenario and its dominant theoretical explanations have come under challenge from a variety of sources. In the face of terrorist threats, the crisis in the global capitalist order after 2008, the rise in global inequality and the many problems facing contemporary democratic societies, one

sees widespread scepticism concerning the analytical capacity of mainstream IR liberalism to find even adequate explanations, let alone answers, for these contemporary issues from its base in a (mainly) positivist methodology (see Sterling-Folker [2015](#)).

The problem, it is suggested, is that an overriding concern to provide empirical evidence for the intrinsic value of DPT, Western institutionalism and the free market leaves a whole range of crucial questions begging: Can liberalism, grounded in Western historical experience, sustain its universal claims in a world of many cultures, religions and political formations? How are [liberal](#) ideals consistent with a global economic practice that actively associates itself with a system of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’? Is mainstream IR liberalism capable of critically examining its fundamental principles in the face of changing global circumstances and challenges?

Some who advocate a more questioning strain of liberalism have sought to confront these challenges and add normative dimensions to the positivist mainstream while addressing major tensions within traditional liberal approaches to IR (Dunne [2009](#); Dunne and Flockhart [2013](#); Forsyth [2000](#); Falk [1999](#)). Following a brief outline of the historical and contemporary nature of the dominant tradition of IR, we will return to this normative questioning of it.

## **The historical-political context**

The term ‘liberalism’ dates only from the nineteenth century, but the distinctive liberal pattern of ideas crystallised much earlier, in the political struggle against monarchical absolutism in seventeenth-century England, and was formulated as a coherent political doctrine by the English philosopher John Locke, whose *Two Treatises of Government* ([1988 \[1690\]](#)) ranks as the first great liberal text. For

Locke, the rights and freedoms of the individual were paramount; therefore, government should rest on consent, not monarchical or religious authority, its powers should be strictly limited, and it should practise religious toleration (see [Box 2.1](#)).

### **Box 2.1: Discussion points**

#### **Early liberal thought**

**Locke (1988 [1690] 306) on liberty: *[T]he end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge Freedom ... where there is no Law, there is no Freedom. For Liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others which cannot be, where there is no Law: But Freedom is not, as we are told, A Liberty for every Man to do what he lists [desires]: (For who could be free, when every other Man's Humour might domineer him?) But a Liberty to dispose, and order, as he lists, his Person, Actions, Possessions, and his whole Property, within the Allowance of those Laws under which he is; and therein not to be subject to the arbitrary Will of another, but freely follow his own.***

(Second Treatise, Chapter VI, paragraph 57)

**Smith (1998 [1776]: 289, 292) on the market's 'invisible hand': Every individual is continually exerting himself to find out the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command. It is his own advantage, indeed, and not that of the society, which he has in view**

**... [H]e intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of his intention. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.**

**(Book IV, Chapter II)**

Political ideas and arguments that would later be identified with liberalism were embraced in the eighteenth century by French [Enlightenment](#) *philosophes* and the American founding fathers. History, viewed as the advance of civilisation, had reached a stage where the oppressive absolutist [regimes](#) of the day lacked all rational justification. It was time to establish government anew, based on universal principles derived from reason. Liberal rights and freedoms were proclaimed in declarations such as the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), and manifestos such as Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791–92) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ([1792](#)). Liberal thought on political economy developed along similar lines. Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* ([1998 \[1776\]](#)), with its themes of the division of labour, [free trade](#) and the beneficent 'invisible hand' of the market, remains the Bible of liberal economists, much revered but little read, its qualifications long forgotten (see [Box 2.1](#)).

Liberal ideas on international relations also emerged in the eighteenth century. Viewing war as irrational violence and attributing it to the unrestrained power, vanity and ambition of monarchs, liberals looked to

the same remedy as for internal oppression: the removal of the old regime. The republics that were to replace it would have no reason to make war, but would be free to enjoy the benefits of peaceful commerce. There is no major theoretical statement of these ideas, but they were drawn together by the principal philosopher of the German Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant ([1970 \[1795\]](#)), in a brief essay titled 'Perpetual Peace'.

Early liberal thought was not democratic. In line with Locke's emphasis on property rights, 'consent' meant election by property-holders – then a small minority. Kant's republics were not democracies. The violence of the French [Revolution](#) confirmed liberal fears of the 'tyranny of the majority' – or, more simply, 'the rule of the mob'. Liberal democracy dates only from the nineteenth century – relatively early in the United States, much later in Europe, and initially for men only. Women had to wait until the twentieth century.

Liberalism has always been a broad creed, permitting many variations. Liberal principles have been grounded in different philosophical systems; there are remarkable contrasts in intellectual styles; and there are even major differences over the content of liberal principles.

[Utilitarianism](#), popularised by Jeremy Bentham, flatly contradicted the natural rights philosophy of most earlier liberals, and the German [idealism](#) that inspired later nineteenth-century liberalism qualified its traditional individualism by introducing a concern for the community.



**Figure 2.1** Mary Wollstonecraft – engraving by James Heath (1757–1834), from a painting by John Opie (1761–1807)

The intellectual style of the Enlightenment was notable for its self-confidence: liberals appealed to reason for unambiguous answers to all questions, and came under criticism for assuming that there were simple solutions, evident to right reason, and that ‘all good things go together’ – that no truly difficult choices need to be made. A quite different style of theorising – reflective and critical, struggling with ethical dilemmas – dates from the time of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* ([1983 \[1859\]](#)) (see [Box 2.2](#)). This became more typical in Europe, especially in the twentieth century, while American liberals remained closer to the Enlightenment tradition.

**Box 2.2:** Discussion points

**John Stuart Mill, from *On Liberty* ([1983](#))**

The aim, therefore, of patriots was to set limits to the power which the ruler should be suffered to exercise over the community; and this limitation was what they meant by liberty. It was attempted in two ways. First, by obtaining a recognition of certain immunities, called political liberties or rights, which it was to be regarded as a breach of duty in the ruler to infringe, and which if he did infringe, specific resistance or general rebellion was held to be justifiable. A second, and generally a later, expedient was the establishment of constitutional checks by which the consent of the community, or of a body of some sort, supposed to represent its interests, was made a necessary condition to some of the more important acts of the governing power.

([1983](#): 60)

[T]he sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection ... the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.

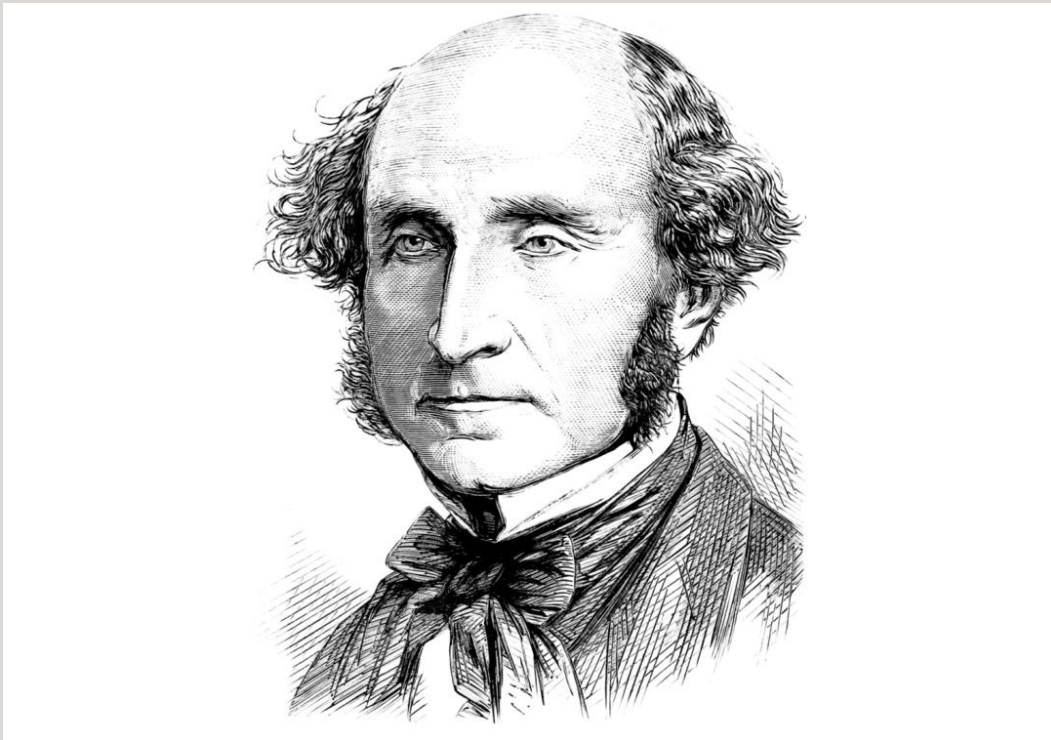
([1983](#): 68)

The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it.

([1983](#): 72)

A major difference over the content of liberal principles opened up in the later nineteenth century. While ‘classical’ liberals retained their faith in the wholly free market (*laissez-faire*) and in limiting the powers of government to the minimum, a new school of thought was more responsive to the socialist critique of the inequities of the early industrial era. These liberals saw a positive role for the [state](#) in preventing the abuse of economic power and in promoting basic services – for example,

in public health and education. For classical liberals, freedom meant freedom from control or interference by the state ('negative freedom'); for growing numbers of liberals, it also meant the opportunity for all members of society to develop their individual capacities ('positive freedom'). This division between two senses of freedom, originally articulated by Benjamin Constant (1988 [1819]) and made famous in the twentieth century by Sir Isaiah Berlin (1982), has proved extraordinarily persistent, re-emerging in the cleavage between today's economic [neoliberalism](#) and the social or 'inclusive' liberalism of those who seek a more equitable ordering of the economy, at both the national and international levels.



**Figure 2.2** Portrait of John Stuart Mill

The critique of [imperialism](#), challenging the traditional liberal confidence in the virtues of the economic [order](#), opened up a further

division within liberalism. J.A. Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study* ([1968](#) [1902]) mounted an uncompromising critique of certain tendencies inherent in the liberal society of the day. Hobson's wide-ranging analysis of the economic and political sources of imperialism, which he saw as a deformation of liberal [capitalism](#), had much in common with the Marxist critique. But whereas Marxists saw no remedy short of war or revolution, Hobson looked to democratic political processes to overcome the vested interests and prejudices that lay behind the phenomenon. Liberal imperialists, on the other hand, continued to support what the French called the 'civilising mission' of European colonial rule (Bell [2006](#), [2016](#); Hindess [2001](#); Pitts [2005](#)).

In relation to international relations more generally, nineteenth-century liberalism remained in opposition to the realist assumptions of great-power diplomacy, maintaining the traditional Enlightenment critique but also bringing in realist arguments of the [national interest](#) to support liberal policies such as free trade, arms reduction, adherence to [international law](#) and support for liberal movements elsewhere. It became evident that liberal principles could lead to opposing policy choices – for example, with respect to intervention, support for nationalism or even involvement in war.

The creation of the League of Nations in 1919 briefly raised hopes for a new liberal international order, but these were dampened by the refusal of the United States to join the League and extinguished by the aggression of the Axis powers in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the liberal vision of Woodrow Wilson, the chief sponsor of the League, and in particular his confidence in the United States leading the way to a universal liberal future, has remained a largely unquestioned premise of US foreign policy.

The mood associated with the founding of the [United Nations](#) in 1945 was more sober, and ‘Cold War liberals’ soon became reconciled to a protracted struggle against the Soviet Union. The preoccupation with the Cold War diverted attention from the principal post-war liberal achievement: the construction, under American auspices, of a dynamic liberal economic order in the Western world. The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union opened the way to the worldwide extension of this system ([‘globalisation’](#)), generating in some circles a mood of liberal triumphalism: there was now no alternative, it was proclaimed, to the market economy and liberal democracy (Fukuyama [1989](#)).

### **Contemporary liberal International Relations theory**

As noted earlier, the three most prominent liberal theories in IR concentrate on issues of democracy, international institutions and economic interdependence, and seek empirical evidence of their virtues and status in the pursuit of global peace, stability and prosperity. [Democratic peace theory](#) is integral to this approach. First set out by Michael Doyle ([1983](#), [1986](#)), it challenges the realist claims that peace depends on the systemic [balance of power](#) rather than the domestic nature of governments. It insists instead that the crucial factor is whether or not the governments of the major powers are democracies. If they are, DPT argues, there will be systemic peace whatever the nature of the balance system might be (e.g. either [unipolar](#) or [multipolar](#)).

The basis for this confidence is the body of evidence assembled in support of the claim that democracies do not go to war against one another (Doyle [1983](#), [1986](#); Russett [1993](#)) ([Box 2.3](#)). Liberal IR theorists offer two principal explanations for this. First, democracies are committed to the principle of resolving political differences non-

violently, and they adhere to this in their relations with other democracies no less than in their internal politics. Second, the publics in democratic societies, who would bear the cost of war, are unwilling to support such action against another democracy.

### **Box 2.3: Discussion points**

#### **Liberal democracy: A peaceful legacy?**

Michael Doyle ([1983](#), [1986](#)) made a powerful and provocative argument in the mid-1980s that modern liberalism bore two main legacies: first, ‘the pacification of foreign relations among liberal states’; and second, ‘international “imprudence”’ (Doyle [1986](#): 1156–7). The first legacy is based on the claim that stable liberal democratic [sovereign states](#) (comprising market economies, the rule of law and democratic representation) historically have never waged war against each other. By exercising restraint, liberal democracies have created a separate ‘zone of peace’. The second legacy is that liberal democracies exercise this restraint, and form a separate zone of peace, only among themselves. Liberal democracies have ‘discovered Liberal reasons for aggression’ (Doyle [1997](#): 206), and continue to fight wars against ‘non-liberal’ and ‘non-democratic’ states. Afghanistan and Iraq are only the most recent examples where liberal democracies have waged such wars. Are they examples of ‘liberal imprudence’?

These explanations are plausible but not conclusive. A realist can argue that the reason for the democratic peace in the twentieth century

was that the democracies were allies against common enemies (Fascism and the Soviet Union), and that since World War II, nuclear weapons have actually been a more secure guarantor of peace than the ascendancy of democracy. A Marxist can argue that peace is to be expected so long as the international system is controlled by a transnational business class with an interest in preserving an economic order highly advantageous to it.

Nevertheless, the thesis of the democratic peace has greatly influenced policy thinking in the United States. This has not always been for the best: scholars of DPT, who never envisaged war as the means of promoting democracy, were dismayed by the way in which their theories were put into practice by George W. Bush (Russett [2005](#)).

A second strand of liberal IR theory has also gained its adherents within US policy communities. It is concerned primarily to explain why, and how, international institutions (e.g. the UN, WTO, G20, IAEA) have become so important in the age of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye [1989](#) [[1977](#)]). It asks about their principal functions, what determines their effectiveness and how much they ‘matter’ – in other words, are they more than just convenient vehicles for the exercise of power by their strongest members? This last question indicates that theorists such as Keohane ([1984](#)) and Lake ([1996](#)) take realism’s power politics perspective very seriously, while arguing that it needs to be supplemented (see [Box 2.4](#)).

#### **Box 2.4:** Discussion points

**Neoliberal institutionalism and neorealism: What’s the difference?**

Neoliberal institutionalism, as the name suggests, identifies with the broad tradition of liberal political thought. However, it shares several key assumptions with neorealism (Nye [1988](#)). Indeed, one of the first major statements of neoliberal institutionalism, Robert Keohane's *After Hegemony* ([1984](#)), explicitly and deliberately embraces neorealism's starting assumptions only to show how they can lead to altogether more 'liberal' and less pessimistic international outcomes if institutions are taken seriously. Keohane accepts not just neorealism's [positivist](#) method, but its substantive claims about the state as a self-interested 'rational egoist', and the international system as a structure of anarchy. Nonetheless, according to Keohane, states are capable of sustaining international cooperation under conditions of anarchy, especially when levels of interdependence are high. Institutions provide mutually beneficial contexts in which information is communicated, transaction costs are reduced and expectations are stabilised (Keohane [1989](#): 166–7). For further reading on neoliberal institutionalism, see Stein ([2008](#)) and J.L. Richardson ([2008](#)).

In particular, liberal institutionalists maintain that international cooperation is more extensive than generally allowed for by realist theory, and that it has become indispensable in many areas, such as economic relations – for example, in the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#). It no longer focuses directly on the goal of promoting peace, but suggests that institutions contribute indirectly to democratic goals by fostering habits of cooperation and a sense of shared interests. It nevertheless acknowledges that this is not an automatic process. A

shared interest in peace or a clean environment, for example, does not ensure that there will be cooperation to achieve it. But in showing how cooperation can be achieved in practice, global institutions can influence the perception of national interests and shape expectations among competing actors, even in an anarchical environment (e.g. in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons). In general, institutional theorists point to the value of communication and the norms and conventions of stable governance as intrinsic to the maintenance of interdependent attitudes and behaviour among actors. Institutions can assist this process by implementing shared goals, apportioning costs and preventing cheating.

The concept of 'regime' is used in this context to explain that institutions are much more than just formal organisations, but also include informal agreements and understandings, as well as norms and practices that can decisively influence the effectiveness of organisational strategies (see Krasner [1983](#)). As an example, the nuclear non-proliferation regime, centred on the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the organisation responsible for monitoring it, the International Atomic Energy Agency, includes informal agreements not to export sensitive technology and equipment, [security](#) assurances to many non-nuclear states and, more generally, the concerting of incentives and disincentives to increase the cost of acquiring nuclear weapons. All of this rests on a broad consensus on the dangers of an unrestricted nuclear proliferation. Developments in Iran and North Korea, in particular, have put this regime under stress in recent years, but thus far it has succeeded in keeping the number of nuclear-armed states far below the number technically capable of acquiring the weapons, and once widely expected to do so.

Western governments for the most part endorse liberal institutionalism in the belief that the increasing recourse to international institutions and multilateral policy processes makes for a more predictable, cooperative and peaceful environment. Indeed, G. John Ikenberry ([2001](#)) argues that the liberal-constitutional post-war order built by the United States and its allies has functioned to bind and restrain US [hegemonic](#) power since 1945. This has not always been effective, of course, and at times major powers such as the United States have preferred [unilateralist](#) strategies when following their perceived interests in the world (e.g. the Bush Administration and the 2003 Iraq War), and have acted without the endorsement of a crucial international regime, the United Nations. This is nevertheless an increasingly rare occurrence, suggest liberal institutionalists, and even the [great powers](#) now acknowledge the order and stability that regimes help to maintain.

In general, it is argued, policy-makers around the world now prefer a situation where important sectors of international activity are regulated through generally accepted rules rather than through the ego-driven rationality of the strongest actors in the system. The active involvement of small and middle powers in the World Trade Organization, in [arms control](#) regimes, in UN [peacekeeping](#) and in regional economic institutions can be understood in these terms. In this context, the contrast between the broad consensus supporting the UN-sanctioned Gulf War (1991) as against the divisiveness of the Iraq War (2003), which lacked the endorsement of the United Nations, is indicative of effective liberal internationalism in action.

The third theoretical school, derived from classical or 'market' liberalism, has focused on the rise of the international trading system. It has sought to explain the shifting relationship between what Richard

Rosecrance ([1986](#)) calls the ‘two worlds of international relations’: the ‘military-political’ world of the territorial states and the increasingly interdependent world of trading states in a capitalist system. This school has seen little innovation, but rather a refinement of the traditional liberal claim that free trade promotes peace. In the years before 1914, liberals were over-optimistic on this score, with some going so far as to assert that the unprecedented interdependence of that era rendered major war impossible – or, as Norman Angell ([1912](#)) put it, ‘futile’.

World War I totally discredited this idea, but ‘market’ liberals now advance the plausible but unremarkable thesis that extensive economic links reduce the likelihood of war among those involved. According to this view, increasing trade and investment enhances prosperity and welfare, and thus strengthens the incentive to avoid actions that could lead to major war. Since the early nineteenth century, this free trade perspective has amounted to an article of faith for liberal economists. IR scholars, while uneasy over the universality of the economists’ claims, tend to defer to them, such that the political economy of trade remains under-developed. Studies of free trade and protection, for example, tend to see the issues through the lenses of orthodox economic theory (Richardson [2001](#)).

An interesting exception is the concept of ‘embedded liberalism’, introduced in John Ruggie’s analysis of the post-1945 international economic order (Ruggie [1982](#)). What was notable about the reconstruction of the liberal system, in Ruggie’s view, was that it did not give total priority to market factors per se, but rather sought a balance with other goals such as full employment, social equity and political stability. He suggests that the success of the liberal reconstruction was due to this balanced approach.

Since the 1980s, however, international economic relations have been reordered in accordance with a neoliberal doctrine that subordinates such political goals to the achievement of market goals in all aspects of economic and social life – primarily via policies of deregulation and privatisation and the free movement of capital. This extended version of classical liberalism, originating in the United States and Britain under Reagan and Thatcher, has been wholeheartedly endorsed by policy communities and governments in many Western countries, where they have dismantled tariff barriers and undertaken major economic restructuring in accordance with neoliberal doctrine (see Yergin and Stanislaw [1999](#)). Although this subordination of society and politics to the rule of the market has been contested in many countries, Western governments have remained committed to the neoliberal orthodoxy – albeit less enthusiastically after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, which shook confidence in its virtues and policy priorities. Since this time (and indeed long before it), there has been extensive theoretical debate on the issues raised by the neoliberal version of globalisation (Harvey [1989](#)). The dominant liberal IR theory school, with its concern for empirically illustrating the positive significance of democracy, institutionalism and trading regimes, has been conspicuously absent from these debates.

To conclude this part of the discussion, it may be said that, at their best, mainstream liberal theory and research have shown that the liberal understanding of current world politics can be more illuminating and comprehensive than the realist perspective. Nevertheless, a number of questions and reservations suggest themselves. A general reservation is that IR theory in the United States still tends to oscillate between realism and liberalism, but these do not exhaust the theoretical universe. This

begs the question of whether mainstream liberal IR theory, like its realist counterpart, is too close to the US foreign policy discourse and policy agenda, mirroring its emphases and silences.

It can indeed appear celebratory and myopic sometimes regarding the systemic status quo – as when the president of the International Studies Association, addressing a major academic gathering, hailed the ascendancy of the liberal interventionist foreign policy of Woodrow Wilson in the wake of the Cold War (Kegley [1993](#)). Francis Fukuyama is another whose views have been invoked as celebratory in tone following his influential ‘End of History’ thesis in 1989. This is, arguably, unfair to a complex and ambiguous argument about the world after the Cold War, but at a moment when issues of religion, culture, nationalism and ethnicity were again forcing themselves to the forefront of the global agenda, Fukuyama seemingly trivialised these challenges on the basis that, ultimately, all peoples will seek the satisfaction of material needs and social aspirations that are universal. More precisely, he proposed that the values of liberal democracy are bound to prevail in the long run.

This has further prompted the questioning of liberal IR theory, particularly its universalist mantra, seen as being out of touch with a rapidly changing world in which, for example, the Chinese and Islamic cultures might remain steadfastly resistant to liberal-democratic values. The suggestion, too, is that it ultimately articulates the worldview of those comfortably located at the top of the global [hierarchy](#) – a ‘globalisation from above’ in Richard Falk’s terms ([1999](#)) – one that ignores the darker side of the contemporary status quo and is silent on a range of other issues that should animate liberal theory and practice.

### **Questioning contemporary liberal International Relations theory**

There are both internal and external critiques of mainstream liberal IR theory. From within the broader liberal framework, for example, thinkers urging a more normative approach have posed questions to the mainstream that, they argue, should not be avoided. For example, what priority should be accorded support for human rights in important relationships with emerging or great powers such as China and Russia? Under what circumstances is humanitarian intervention justified and must it be approved by the United Nations (see [Chapter 31](#))? Is there an obligation to assist the globally disadvantaged, many of them at the margins of subsistence (see [Chapters 8, 21, 27, 32 and 33](#))?

There are no simple answers to any of these questions, but the task of normative IR theory is to establish consistent ethical principles, grounded in a coherent philosophy in order that they might be addressed adequately. Since philosophies differ over fundamentals (see [Chapter 1](#)), this cannot lead to a consensus per se. Nevertheless, the search for a coherent philosophical grounding enhances the awareness of ethical issues and the import of contending (albeit hidden) philosophical assumptions in the process by which we understand the world and construct our ‘concrete’ (policy) decisions in relation to it (Reus-Smit [2012, 2013a](#)).

Philosophically, liberalism is at the crossroads of many traditions, among them the classical ‘market’ tradition touched on above, the utilitarian tradition, pragmatism, [Kantian](#) thought and the more recent (Kantian-inspired) contributions of John Rawls ([1971, 1999](#)). Within each tradition, it is possible to distinguish between its ‘ideal’ form – a normative vision based on first principles – and variants that focus on what is ‘practicable’ when accepted ethical principles come into conflict (see [Chapter 8](#)). Students of international relations tend to be drawn to

the practicable variants, and even to disparage ‘ideal theory’ as utopian. But as Amartya Sen ([2009](#)) argues, there is always a need for both approaches, primarily because ideal theory enlarges the awareness of what might *become* practicable.

This is a theme that can briefly be perused in relation to the question of global distributive justice – a touchstone issue for many liberals in the IR community. Western development assistance dates from the 1950s, but the issue of global distributive justice stems from developing world demands for a new international economic order in the 1970s. The policy issues and the problems of effective implementation resonate with highly complex ‘practicable’ factors here, but a normative theory approach suggests that policy decisions on this issue should be directed by a sense of common humanity and a social justice ethic, not the narrow self-interest of the globally wealthy.

This is a position that is given short shrift by market liberal icons such as Friedrich Hayek ([1976](#)), for whom justice can refer only to the conduct of individuals, not the ordering of society. Thus social justice is a meaningless concept: there can be no obligation to assist the disadvantaged. The utilitarian tradition can be articulated in a number of ways on this issue, but its principle of ‘the greatest good of the greatest number’ can be interpreted to justify an entirely different position to that of Hayek. A utilitarian position could indeed justify the transfer of resources on an almost unimaginable scale, since any additional resources made available to the poor will tend to increase their welfare by a greater amount than the loss of those resources will diminish the welfare of the well off.

The debate between Rawls and his followers develops these themes. Rawlsian theory starts from the ethical principle that social inequalities

can be justified only if their overall effect is to benefit the least well off (Rawls [1971](#)). This is usually understood as supportive of measures that enhance the well-being and opportunities of the socially disadvantaged (Rawls, [1999](#)). Rawls excluded international relations from his deliberations on this issue, however, suggesting that it did not represent a single political community. Some Rawlsian theorists (e.g. Thomas Pogge) have questioned this view, stressing the extent to which everyday social life around the world has increasingly become framed by the attitudinal and structural regulations of global institutions that actually operate in favour of small elites in both rich and poor countries. The resulting neo-Rawlsian liberal position does not allow for near-limitless transfers of resources in accordance with utilitarian logic, but it does provide a theoretical justification for ‘practicable’ transfers to meet the urgent needs of the poor, well beyond present limits (see Pogge [2002](#)).

This brief engagement with some of the philosophical tributaries flowing into the contemporary liberal IR mainstream has sought to illustrate, among other things, how distinctions between empirical and normative theory undermine a more complete understanding of international relations. It suggests, too, that the dominant IR theory approach could benefit substantially from philosophical attitudes and insights drawn on by normative theorists. Yet, as recent external critics of the liberal theory mainstream have proposed, this is unlikely to happen. At one level, it is argued, this is because mainstream IR liberalism is politically inclined towards a retention of a systemic status quo, centred on the global necessity of American leadership, of neoliberal globalisation and of Western-led institutionalism – a worldview that effectively is incompatible with a normative questioning of first principles.

A related and even more profound incompatibility is perceived in the ongoing commitment to a ‘standard social scientific methodology’ and the ‘same foundational template, the same logic and the same epistemology for understanding how the world works as those from 30 or 40 years ago’ (Sterling-Folker [2015](#): 43–4). This helps to explain, perhaps, why mainstream liberal IR theory has effectively been absent from the otherwise vibrant theoretical debates that have taken place within international relations circles since the 1980s.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has touched on three aspects of the complex world of Liberal IR theory: its history and development in the modern era of capitalism, democracy and enlightenment; its (brief) status at the apex of Western IR theorising after World War I and at the core of the US intellectual and foreign policy communities after the Cold War; and its challenges in the twenty-first century as its perceived complacency, ideological commitment and theoretical limitations have come under scrutiny.

The final section touched on some of these challenges from within the broad liberal tradition in particular, but a more positive theme needs to be reiterated when any of these criticisms are taken into account: that an emphasis on democratic politics, the nature and significance of institutional ‘regimes’ and on global trading relations arguably provides a much more pertinent frame of reference for contemporary IR thinking than the view proffered for so long by the dominant realist approach. This is particularly the case if one acknowledges that contemporary liberal IR theory treats ‘power politics’ themes seriously and

respectfully, even while denying that they provide a fundamental explanation for a limited ‘art of the possible’ in IR.

On this issue, contemporary IR liberalism proffers a fundamental liberal principle, which proposes that social and political evils are not just a given of human nature or the state system, but can be remedied in good (democratic) societies and systems, if only after protracted struggles. In this regard, liberal IR theory in the twenty-first century speaks directly to much of the new agenda in this text (see [Introduction](#) and [Part 3](#)) and is therefore, despite all its limitations, a valuable and often insightful conduit to understanding a complex and volatile world order.

### **Discussion questions**

**2.1** List the major historical and intellectual factors that shaped liberalism.

**2.2** There are a number of distinct ‘liberalisms’. Which of these has most influenced the international relations agenda?

**2.3** What did the neo-Kantian liberalism of Woodrow Wilson stand for in the years between the two World Wars? Is Wilsonian liberalism still significant in the contemporary era?

**2.4** What are the main characteristics of ‘market’ liberalism? Are these characteristics discernible in the neoliberal globalisation project?

**2.5** What is democratic peace theory?

**2.6** How do countries other than the US embody liberalism in their foreign policy?

## *Further reading*

Bell, Duncan 2016, *Reordering the world: Essays on liberalism and empire*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *A masterful history of liberal political thought about international relations and its entanglement with imperial ideology.*

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Dunne, Tim and Flockhart, Trine (eds) 2013, *Liberal world orders*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An edited collection of essays on liberal ordering practices in international relations.*

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Gray, John 1995, *Liberalism*, 2nd ed., Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. *A concise historical outline of liberal political thought.*

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Howard, Michael 1978, *War and the liberal conscience*, London: Temple Smith. *A classic account of liberal thinking about war from the Renaissance to the twentieth century.*

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Kegley, Charles W. Jr (ed.) 1995, *Controversies in international relations theory: Realism and the neoliberal challenge*, New York: St Martin's Press. *Contains a number of very useful chapters on contemporary liberalism.*

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Keohane, Robert O. 1989, *International institutions and state power: Essays in international relations theory*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press. *A collection of chapters by one of the leading theorists of neoliberal institutionalism.*

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Richardson, James L. 2001, *Contending liberalisms in world politics: Ideology and power*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. *An extended set of reflections on the theory and practice of liberalism in international relations.*

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Russett, Bruce 1993, *Grasping the democratic peace: Principles for a post-Cold War world*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *Presents an incomparable*

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*overview of liberal institutional theory on the democratic peace.*

# 3

## Realism



**Michele Chiaruzzi**

[Introduction](#)

[Who are the realists? Genesis of a tradition of thought](#)

[What is realism? Synthesising theory and practice](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Discussion questions](#)

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### Introduction

This chapter reflects on the tradition of political thought known as realism. Its main purposes are to identify who realists are and to explain what realism is in the study of international relations. The first part of the chapter introduces students to some important thinkers – both ancient and modern – ascribed to the realist tradition of thought. It also identifies two broad strands of realist thought: ‘classical’ and ‘structural’, or ‘neo-realist’. The chapter then investigates attempts to conceive realism as a unified theory and practice of international

relations. It highlights realism's central concepts of the state and anarchy before reflecting on realism's normative dimension.

Historically, [realism](#) has been the dominant theory of International Relations (IR) and a point of reference for alternative theories – even if only critically. It aspires to be suprahistorical, explaining in all epochs the fundamental features of international politics, particularly conflict and war. Emerging in the 1930s, realism's polemical target was the progressive, reformist optimism connected with [liberal](#) internationalists such as American president Woodrow Wilson. Against this optimism, realism comported a more pessimistic outlook that was felt to be necessary in the tragic realm of international politics.

Realists lay claim to a long tradition of political thought, including such eminent thinkers as Thucydides, Machiavelli and Hobbes, whose point of departure is the study of conflict and power politics. According to realists, conflict is inevitable – even necessary – in international politics. When disputes cannot be resolved peacefully or diplomatically, force – which ultimately leads to war – is viewed as a decisive means of settling matters. Insofar as order exists in international relations, it is the precarious product of the balance of power or [hegemony](#) (supremacy by a [great power](#) and its allies), according to realists (Dehio [1963](#); Levy [1983](#)). The pragmatic acceptance of conflict and power politics is essential to realism's outlook. But who are the realists? And what is realism? This chapter provides answers these two questions.

Realism is best understood as both an eclectic and plural tradition of thought, rather than a theory as such, and a practical guide to the politics of international relations. Realists are political theorists and practitioners who, since the [inter-war years](#) (1918–38), have self-consciously subscribed to this tradition of thought. They know the relationship between theory and practice is complex. Wherever choices have to be made and decisions taken, the gulf

between generalisations and the unique case that calls for action is deep and cannot be bridged.

Despite the efforts of late twentieth-century neo-realists such as Kenneth Waltz ([1979](#)), realism is not properly speaking a theory – an explicative coherent whole, clearly defined by an explicit set of axioms and propositions. Rather, realism is the name given by exponents and critics alike to a tradition of thought signifying an approach to international relations that claims to avoid wishful thinking by dealing with international politics as they actually are, rather than as we would like them to be. It does not abandon morality altogether, but it does extol a morality specific to the state (*[raison d'état](#)*, or reason of state) and statesman (ethics of responsibility). So, although realism rejects morality as the starting point for the theory and practice of international relations, it does not eschew morality altogether (Murray [1997](#): Chapter 3; Hulsman and Lieven [2005](#)).

## **Who are the realists? Genesis of a tradition of thought**

### **The classical approach: Realism**

In one of his 1950s lectures, Martin Wight, a British professor, told his students, ‘The initial pointer towards the Realists was that they are those who emphasise in international relations the element of [anarchy](#), of [power politics](#) and of warfare. Everyone is a Realist nowadays, and the term in this sense needs no argument’ (Wight [1991](#): 15). Wight is emphasising the distinctive importance and disciplinary dominance of realism as a tradition in the theory and practice of international politics, but he also alludes to some of realism’s key tenets: the concept of anarchy and the historical supposition that international relations are

unavoidably shaped by power politics and war. According to the realist construction of the tradition, the intellectual origins of these tenets may be traced back to the historical and political thought of arguably the first and the greatest political realists respectively, Athenian general (*strategos*) and historian Thucydides (c. 460–406 BCE) and Florentine diplomat and writer Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527).

One of the reasons for realism's enduring relevance is its emphasis on history. Realism claims to speak about historical reality, and takes its convictions, orientations and practice from history. Thus it is not surprising that we can locate its roots in the Greek political and historical thought of the fifth century BCE, as embodied in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1972) (see [Box 0.3](#) in the Introduction). Looking at the clash between the great powers of his time (Athens, Sparta and Persia), Thucydides searched for the fundamental causes of conflict, the profound logics behind political events and the instruments of power deployed by political actors – openly, secretly or through dissimulation. He concentrated on war because war is the ultimate test for those who want to distinguish reality from appearance in international politics. As the name itself reveals, this resolute striving to engage with stubborn political realities – no matter how tragic or unpleasant – is one of the principal claims of realism as a tradition of thought.



**Figure 3.1** Niccolò Machiavelli

In the most controversial and powerful advice-book for rulers ever written, Machiavelli's *The Prince* ([1998 \[1513\]](#)), written during the critical age of the Italian city-states, we can detect a view of international politics partly inherited from ancient political thought. We find, for example, a cyclical conception of history based on a recurrent nexus of necessity, chance and human decision-making.

In [Chapter 25](#), Machiavelli ([1998](#)) says that 'it may be true that fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, but ... she still leaves the control of the other half (or a bit less) to us'. This sentence may be taken as an attempt to describe the limits of freedom in politics. The incongruence between agent's intention and

results is a constant feature because the warping of intention by the historical context is a regular and repeated experience of international politics.

Using a modern expression, international relations is conceived as a 'realm of recurrence and repetition' where 'political action is most regularly necessitous' (Wight [1966](#): 26). The essence of this recurrence and repetition lies in the historical fact that rulers are called upon regularly to suspend conventional moral and legal rules to deflect threats to the state. We can call this Machiavelli's doctrine of necessity, which is central to the logic of politics.

We see in Machiavelli's writings recognition of the autonomy of politics from other realms of human action, most especially its ultimate independence from morality and law. Politics has its own rules, and cannot be reduced to or constrained by moral or legal rules, since it must respond to the demands of necessity. We also see the primacy of the political, because conflict and competition for power are inevitable and irrepressible. Four centuries later, these notions of the autonomy and primacy of the political were rearticulated and reformulated by two influential German jurists, Hans J. Morgenthau ([2012](#)) and Carl Schmitt ([1976](#)), who identified the intense antagonism between friend and enemy as the crucial dimension of concrete historical politics.

Above all, it was through Machiavelli's analytical lens that it became possible to regard international politics as free of ethical prescriptions. He insisted on attending to 'the effectual truth' of political matters, not [idealised](#) or [utopian](#) constructions (Machiavelli [1998](#): 52). In other words, he advocated a clear-eyed, pragmatic consideration of the amorality of power that St Augustine (AD 354–430) acknowledged from a Christian perspective and that was to become so influential on many twentieth-century realists, including Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Butterfield. Significantly, Carr ([1946](#): 63) considers Machiavelli 'the first important political realist'. From Machiavelli, he deduces three essential realist tenets. First, 'history is a sequence of cause and effect,

whose course can be analysed and understood by intellectual effort, but not ...directed by “imagination”’. Second, ‘theory does not create practice ..., but practice theory’. Third, and most contentious, ‘morality is the product of power’ (Carr [1946](#): 63–4). Finally, Machiavelli – like Thucydides and St Augustine – draws our attention to certain anthropological and psychological features alleged to be constant. They discern the political dimension of human nature, and the role of fear, avarice and ambition in driving political action and generating conflict.

This combination corresponds to the causes of war indicated by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). His masterpiece *Leviathan* ([1968 \[1651\]](#)) has provided the realist tradition with perhaps its most fundamental idea, later taken up by the French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78): that international life is a miserable condition because it is actually a condition of war, whether latent or actual. Realists conceive the anarchical structure of international relations through an analogy with an imaginary and primordial condition called the state of nature. In this ‘natural condition’, argues Hobbes in [Chapter 13](#) of *Leviathan* ([1968](#): 185), individuals exist in a lawless or ungoverned environment, ‘without a common Power to keep them all in awe’. Hobbes equates this state of nature, which exists prior to the establishment of a state, with a state of war (see [Box 3.1](#)). To escape this intolerable condition, individuals agree to enter a civil society and install a sovereign power. But although individuals may escape this state of war, the states they form do not, Hobbes suggests; international relations are thus a state of war.

### **Box 3.1: Terminology**

#### **Hobbes’ ‘state of nature’**

In *Leviathan* (1968), Hobbes portrays the state of nature as the antithesis of the civil society that forms when individuals agree to establish a state and sovereign authority. The state of nature, says Hobbes, is a state of war that pits ‘every man, against every man’ because there is no ‘common Power to keep them all in awe’ (1968: 185). In such a condition there is no justice, no law, and no property, says Hobbes (1968: 188); ‘every man has a Right to every thing’ (1968: 190). This is why Hobbes famously described the life of individuals in this condition as ‘solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short’ (1968: 186).

This condition originates in the absence of an over-arching sovereign power. Therefore domestic political life, where sovereignty is present, is essentially different from international life, where there is no world government. This latter condition is properly described in modern terms as international anarchy. This does not indicate a state of disorder or chaos, but rather captures the fact that sovereign states do not recognise any other higher authority above themselves. Two fundamental consequences derive from the absence of world government (or the presence of a state of nature) according to realists: first, nothing can impede the normal recurrence of war; and second, states are responsible for their own self-preservation. International relations take place within ‘the shadow of war’ (Aron 1966: 6).

### **A turning point: The ‘international anarchy’**

The expression ‘international anarchy’ made its first appearance during the Great War, and became a fundamental concept not just for realists but more generally for IR as a twentieth-century academic discipline. Ironically, G. Lowes

Dickinson, who published books titled *The European Anarchy* (1916) and *The International Anarchy* (1926), was one of the authors whom British diplomat, newspaper editor and historian E.H. Carr ([1946](#)) discredited as a naïve idealist in his classic, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*. This latter book, considered by one historian (Haslam [2002](#): 187) as 'the first coherent realist theory yet in print', has had an immense impact not just on realist thought but on the development of IR as a discipline.

Carr's seminal text has been discussed and debated endlessly since it was published on the brink of World War II. Originally proposed under the title *Utopia and Reality*, it consists of a polemical attack in the name of realism against the so-called utopian approach. Carr considered this intellectual approach – basically consistent with nineteenth-century principles of liberalism (see [Chapter 2](#)) – to be flawed, and in many respects responsible for the disaster of World War I. The most important, and the most problematic, assumption was that of a natural harmony of interests in international relations, born of 'the almost total neglect of the factor of [power](#)' (Carr [1946](#): vii).

For Carr international relations have an oligarchical configuration, where a few states are more important than others. States are basically divided into two classes, which he called the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. The inescapable disparity between the 'haves' – states that possess wealth and power and that are satisfied with the existing international [order](#) ([status quo](#) powers) – and the 'have-nots' – dissatisfied states or [revisionist](#) powers – explains recurrent tensions. Therefore, Carr ([1946](#): 51). rejects 'the utopian assumption that there is a world interest in peace which is identifiable with the interest of each individual [nation](#)'. This 'harmony of interests' assumption fulfils an ideological rather than analytical function, concealing 'the unpalatable fact of a fundamental divergence of interest between nations desirous of maintaining the status quo and nations desirous of changing it' ([1946](#): 51).

At the end of World War II, Hans J. Morgenthau, a German-Jew who escaped from Nazi Germany to the United States, would again declare the end of liberal illusion and its [rationalist](#) faith in progress. Echoing Nietzschean sentiments, Morgenthau conceded ‘the tragic presence of evil in all political action’, and ‘the lust for power [which] manifests itself as the desire to maintain the range of one’s own person with regard to others, to increase it, or to demonstrate it’ (Morgenthau [1946](#): 202–3, 192). Like US ambassador George Kennan ([1951](#)), Morgenthau was sceptical about human rationality in international politics and critical of the excessive American confidence in a ‘legalistic-moralistic approach’ to international relations (Morgenthau [1973](#): 11). These realists stress the corrupting and pervasive influence of power on human relations, including international relations. Morgenthau’s seminal book, *Politics Among Nations* ([1973](#)), first published in 1948, places power at the centre of the political universe, declaring: ‘International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power’ ([1973](#): 25). However, this struggle does not obstruct a search for a rational – as opposed to a ‘rationalist’ – understanding and conduct of international politics.

Morgenthau’s commitment is summarised in six general principles of political realism, which are a concise formalisation of a more complex theory (Morgenthau [1973](#): 3–13). Here we can recognise some of the typical elements we have seen in other realists: a flawed human nature in which the laws of politics have their roots; politics as an autonomous field of human activity; moral principles with relative, rather than universal, value (see [Box 3.2](#) for Morgenthau’s full list of realist principles). Among these principles, one deserves particular attention. According to Morgenthau, there is a ‘main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics’: this is ‘the concept of interest defined in terms of power’, which he considers ‘an objective category which is universally valid’. It is this concept

that makes possible the distinction between political and non-political facts. It also provides the 'link between reason trying to understand international politics and the facts to be understood' (1973: 5). The rationale behind this notion is linear: if we think in terms of interest defined as power, we think as statesmen and stateswomen think. Thus we can understand, and perhaps foresee, their thought and actions. However, before any other purpose in foreign policy, these actions are – or should be – directed towards the defence of the [national interest](#), what one's own nation needs and wants in order to achieve its aims.

### **Box 3.2: Discussion points**

#### **Hans J. Morgenthau's six principles of political realism**

- 1 Politics are governed by 'objective laws that have their roots in human nature'.
- 2 The concept of 'national interest defined in terms of power' is the most important foreign policy goal.
- 3 While 'interest defined as power' remains unaffected by historical change, the exercise of power is permanent.
- 4 'Universal moral principles' cannot be used to judge the actions of states in their abstract formulation. Prudence is the morality proper to politics.
- 5 'Political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe'.
- 6 Politics is an autonomous sphere, distinct from, and not subordinate to the standards of, economics, law, morality and

so on (Morgenthau, [1973](#): 3–13).

Notwithstanding the contested nature of the national interest, in the context of international anarchy, [security](#) is one of the interests that Raymond Aron ([1966](#): 72), following Hobbes, calls ‘eternal’. As in the state of nature, self-help is the only certain means to the uncertain end of self-preservation or survival. Each state aspires to survive as independent, making major decisions on its own. But, in the last analysis, it can count only on itself. Since sovereign states do not recognise any other higher authority, nothing other than states themselves can prevent, or counter, the use of force in their relations. It is only through the [balance of power](#) that states – alone or through [alliances](#) – can check the power of other states. Most importantly, the balance of power can preserve a state’s independent existence from threat, aggression and [hegemony](#) (the domination by a great power and its allies). It is for these reasons that realists see the balance of power as the only real means to achieve [common security](#).

[Diplomacy](#), the art of communication and negotiation between powers (see [Chapter 20](#)), is an essential part of the conscious preservation of political equilibrium among states. Its basic task is to ‘circumvent the occasions of war, and to extend the series of circumvented occasions’ (Wight [1978](#): 137). It is also for this reason that some realists (Aron [1966](#)), including former US Secretary of State and Nobel Peace Prize winner Henry Kissinger ([1964](#)) and George Kennan, have assigned a relevant role not just to power and its distribution among states, or to the motives and intentions of statesmen and stateswomen, but also to the nature of states and their internal characteristics. Cultural and ideological factors matter because states that belong to the same type and share common policy goals prefer to resolve disputes through the work of a trusted

diplomacy. Having considered the concepts and ideas of some authors of classical realism, we should now explore what is called structural realism or neo-realism.

### **The structural approach: Neorealism**

The basis of [neo-realism](#) is a scientific method that systematises core doctrines of realist thought into a structural model of international relations. Elaborated during the second half of the Cold War (see [Chapter 10](#)), it is based more on economic theory and the philosophy of science than on historical reflection. In Waltz's ([1959](#), [1979](#)) parsimonious version, neo-realism breaks the connection between the internal and external dimensions of politics, denying that the internal structure of states has any serious effect on interstate relations. By defining the structure of the international system, neo-realism seeks to establish the autonomy of international politics.

Waltz rejects the classical realist arguments that human nature and the domestic character of states are relevant factors in explaining fundamental aspects of international relations. War, alliances, the formation of a balance of power and the precariousness of cooperation cannot be explained by focusing on the behaviour of the 'units' or states in themselves, an approach Waltz criticises as reductionist. States – or 'units', according to Waltz – must be treated as empty boxes because their domestic arrangements and characteristics do not really make a difference at the level of the international system, which is the concern of international relations theories. At the system level, it is the fundamental structure of anarchy that shapes the behaviour of states or units, not their internal make-up.

For a systemic analysis of structure, Waltz says, there are only three elements that matter: the differentiation of units, the organising principle and the

distribution of capabilities (see [Box 3.3](#)). However, with regard to the international system, the differentiation of units is irrelevant, since states are undifferentiated in their primary function: to produce their own security. States are required to pursue their own security because no one else can be counted on to do so. The reason is that the organising principle of the international system is anarchy, not hierarchy, and ‘self-help is necessarily the principle of action in an anarchic order’ (Waltz [1979](#): 111). This structural condition constantly obliges each state to guard its security and defend its relative position with regard to other states without relying on others.

### **Box 3.3: Terminology**

#### **Waltz’s theory of international politics: Key terms**

System = structure + interacting units.

Structure, says Waltz ([1979](#):79) is ‘the system-wide component that makes it possible to think of the system as a whole’. It is made up of three components:

- 1** ordering principle, sometimes called ‘deep structure’ (either hierarchy or anarchy)
- 2** differentiation of units according to their function (in international relations the units (states) are functionally the same or *undifferentiated* – performing the same range of functions and concerned primarily with security)
- 3** distribution of capabilities (how states stand in relation to one another, according to the power they can mobilise and the aggregation of power around one or more poles – unipolarity, bipolarity, multipolarity).

Anarchy imposes mistrust and uncertainty on others' intentions, obstructing mutually advantageous cooperation even in 'soft' dimensions like economics and trade (Grieco [1990](#)). States, like oligopolistic firms, must be concerned with the asymmetric distribution of advantage, worrying about relative gains ('Who will gain more?') rather than absolute gains ('Will both of us make some gain?'). Further, cooperation under anarchy is limited because it is risky to be dependent on others who are free to cheat. [Interdependence](#) thus produces not just amity, as liberals claim, but also – and more importantly – reciprocal vulnerability, according to neo-realists.

Virtually all states 'at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination' (Waltz [1979](#): 118). Hence the distribution of capabilities across states – especially in the military field – is the only fundamental changing element in the international system. As a result, it can be [bipolar](#) (with two great powers) or [multipolar](#) (more than two). These systemic configurations are produced regularly by the balance of power, which counteracts excessive accumulation of power, even provoking war. Like Rousseau ([1917 \[1756\]](#): 138), Waltz ([1979](#)) views the balance of power as working as an automatic mechanism. It is not the product of intentional diplomatic efforts made by states; on the contrary, it is an unintentional and inevitable outcome of their interactions under conditions of anarchy. Facing the unavoidable repercussions of balance of power constraints, great powers tend to adopt a defensive behaviour that upholds the status quo. For this reason, the international system – like the market – always tends towards equilibrium, according to Waltz's theory of international politics.

Neo-realists present at least one other view. Gilpin offers a powerful theory of change that, in contrast to Waltz's static structuralism, explains the creation

and waning of international systems. Gilpin argues that the balance of power historically has played only a secondary role in limiting states' expansion when compared with other countervailing elements such as natural barriers, the [loss-of-strength gradient](#), economic and technological limits, and domestic institutions. His central argument is that hegemonic war is the basic mechanism of systemic change in international relations (Gilpin [1981](#): Chapter 5). A relatively stable international system is characterised by a hierarchical ordering of states based on hegemony. Over time, though, the power of one subordinate state grows and it comes into conflict with the hegemonic state. The conflict between these contenders and their allies leads to an adjustment to changed power realities – either violently, through a hegemonic war that can have global repercussions, or peacefully, through power accommodation. The result is the transformation into a new hierarchical international system that creates a different basis of political order at both the domestic and international levels.

John Mearsheimer ([2001](#): 29, 250), concentrating on war and strategy in his *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, suggests that great powers 'are always searching for opportunities to gain power over their rivals'. Here Mearsheimer diverges from both Waltz and Carr. Great powers, he argues, are rarely satisfied, and instead seek to extend their hegemony. This implies that the ultimate concern for states is not simply for security, as Waltz asserts ([1979](#)), but for maximising power. Here Mearsheimer's offensive realism is closer to Morgenthau's classical realism than it is to Waltz's neo-realism.

Mearsheimer has studied how offensively oriented states could behave as [revisionist](#) powers in response to structural constraints. Thus he has considered one of the criticisms made of neo-realism by contemporary realists. These realists, who have integrated into their thinking elements of the classical tradition (and thus earn the name 'neoclassical' realists), have contested neo-realism's assumption that all states have an equal set of interests (Schweller

[1998](#)). Some have reaffirmed the relevance of domestic politics and human nature factors, like perceptions and motivations (Walt [1987](#)); others have challenged the automaticity that neo-realism attributes to the political process, primarily the balance of power (Schweller [2006](#)). All of this suggests that realism is a broad tradition of thought with an ongoing debate about the relative importance of power and security in grasping the interests of states under conditions of anarchy.

## **What is realism? Synthesising theory and practice**

The previous section showed that realists compose an eclectic and heterogeneous tradition of thought with at least two main approaches: classical and structural, named realism and neo-realism. Despite their differences, the two varieties of realism share key concepts and doctrines, as explained above. In this section, we will reconcile the two varieties of realism into a single scheme of thought. Two shared assumptions are analysed: the state as the main actor in world politics and the logic of anarchy as a dominant constraint in international relations. Finally, we will consider realism as a practical guide to politics that, despite allegations to the contrary, affirms two moral values: prudence and responsibility.

### **The state**

We have seen that realism, as a theory of international politics, is concerned principally with states as power – and security – maximising actors in a context of international anarchy. States are the fundamental units of organised, hierarchical power, and their relations dominate world politics (see [Chapter 11](#)). It is possible to identify three key features of the state as understood by realism.

First, states possess [sovereignty](#), the supreme authority to make and enforce laws. Second, states govern by exercising a monopoly over both internal and external instruments of legitimate violence (embodied in the police and armed forces respectively). Third, these sovereign organisations are territorial, partitioning the world by imposing both material and immaterial barriers between people (namely, borders and citizenship respectively).

Other existing organisations – international (e.g. United Nations), supranational (e.g. European Union), transnational (e.g. NGOs) – perform important roles but are always ultimately subordinate to states – or at least to the most powerful among them. [International law](#) occupies an analogous condition of subordination, being the product of the contingent will and actual practice of the states (see [Chapter 18](#)). Individuals and other non-state actors (e.g. activists, transnational corporations) without the state's support have reduced political space to conduct their trans-border activities in international relations (see [Chapter 23](#)).

States perform essential political, social and economic functions for all other actors in world politics, and no other organisation appears today as a possible competitor (Spruyt [1994](#)). In particular, most powerful states make the rules and maintain the institutions that shape international life, including its economic and cultural dimensions, popularly known as 'globalisation' (Waltz [1999](#)). That is why, even today, globalisation's core values are those championed by the United States and its liberal and capitalist allies, predominantly in the West. These values could change if another state with different values and interests – perhaps China – were to achieve hegemony in international relations, but the point for realism is that dominant global trends generally depend on the power and interests of hegemonic states.

For realism, the international use of violence by civil factions – like terrorists – against a foreign enemy's territory is nothing new or unusual. There

are historical precedents, such as the Egyptian-based *fedayeen* raid against Israel before the 1956 war. What is new are the ideological goals and the worldwide nature of Islamist terrorism, in particular its links across frontiers, as in the case of the 9/11 attacks on the United States (see [Chapter 29](#)). Among other things, these attacks represented a challenge to the claim that only states may legitimately employ violence. In response, a US-led coalition of states destroyed the Afghan-based terrorist headquarters of al-Qaeda and overthrew the ruling Taliban government. Shortly thereafter, '9/11' was taken as an opportunity by the world's most powerful state and its allies to launch a war against Iraq, despite opposition from many states and by the United Nations. The United States thus reasserted its legitimacy and power in the face of the terrorist challenge by attacking states alleged to be complicit with terrorism. Moreover, the actions of the United States are consistent with Mearsheimer's logic of offensive realism. Since opposition to the Iraq War did not generate a balancing coalition, US power was left unchecked. This may be considered a concrete sign of [unipolarity](#), meaning the supremacy of the United States in an international system bereft of any comparable power.

### **Anarchy**

The logic of international anarchy conditions and constrains interstate relations. For realism, conflict over power and insecurity can only definitively be superseded through a hierarchical structure of dominion based on command and obedience – in other words, when world government supersedes anarchy. In the absence of world government, security can only be obtained through self-help. For this reason, survival is of paramount relevance in international relations, and fear is a fundamental emotion because it is an indispensable emotion for survival.

The absence of an over-arching authority to prevent and counter the use of force creates a crucial uncertainty about others' intentions. This lack of trust generates what, in 1748, the French philosopher Montesquieu ([2000](#): 224) called a 'disease' that has 'necessarily become contagious'. He was noting that

as soon as one state increases what it calls its troops, the other suddenly increases theirs, so that nothing is gained thereby but the common ruin. Each monarch keeps ready all the armies ... and this state in which all strain against all is called peace.

In modern terms, this spiral of insecurity is called the [security dilemma](#) (Herz [1962](#)). It means that providing for one's own security can – often inadvertently – increase the sense of insecurity in other states. Thus the military arrangements of one state, including 'defensive' arrangements, are likely to be matched by other states, thereby creating a dangerous spiral that, paradoxically, leaves every state feeling even more insecure.

International anarchy breeds not only fear but also hostility among states. When this hostility is mixed with scarcity of resources, it makes peaceful and just solutions to political conflicts difficult to achieve. Indeed, without hostility an equal distribution of resources or power would be possible. Without scarcity, hostility could be neutralised. For realism, this is not the case in international politics. Hostility and scarcity are structural conditions left unsettled by the absence of a common government. Hence conflict is inevitable and may always reach the point where [war](#) becomes a legitimate instrument for reaching a final decision.

### **Prudence and responsibility**

Neorealism is more theoretically rigorous but less historically or normatively rich than classical realism. The scientific inspiration of the former reduces or

removes the latter's normative interest in the tension between morality and politics – a tension that inevitably affects the conduct of statesmen and stateswomen in the realm of international relations. However, implicitly or explicitly, we can find a common normative theme: the ethic of responsibility.

The logic of international politics grants supreme moral value to the survival of the state and its interests. This supreme moral value – which legitimates the infringement of 'secondary' values such as liberty and justice, because they depend on the state's survival first and foremost – yields the doctrine of reason of state (Meinecke [1962](#)). Reason of state (from the original French, *raison d'état*) is a specifically political form of reasoning that responds to necessity. It is based on the idea that politics is both autonomous and primary; that political reasoning – especially when the state's vital survival or interests are at stake – obeys its own rules and logics, independently of morality or law.

But this is not to say that reason of state is completely free of normative intent (see [Box 3.4](#)). As already indicated, reason of state is a morality of and for states; it generates an 'ethic of responsibility', as opposed to an 'ethic of conviction', to use Max Weber's ([1948](#)) terms. The latter conceives politics as the realisation of morally pure 'ultimate ends'. The former, by contrast, is based on a sharp distinction between personal and political moral behaviour, and privileges consequences over intentions. Good intentions or convictions do not matter in international politics as much as the consequences of actions, which is why realists have often been outspoken critics of US foreign policy adventurism (see [Box 3.5](#)). The duty of statesmen and stateswomen is to accept the responsibility for these consequences on behalf of the nation. It involves the respect of the limits of political action. Justifying bad consequences in terms of good convictions is politically unacceptable. On the contrary, leaders must confront the reality that good political consequences often require morally questionable, or even evil, means. For Machiavelli ([1998](#): 60), this meant rulers

were often obliged to act against conventional ethics, and should be prepared ‘to enter into evil when necessity commands’. Necessity is an important concept, but always as a subjective experience of the coercion of events, never as objective causality. In international politics, as in life, there is always an alternative – even if between the lesser of two evils.

**Box 3.4:** Discussion points

**Realism’s political morality**

**Morgenthau (1973: 3–4) on the ‘lesser evil’:** This being inherently a world of opposing interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully realized ... [Realism] appeals to historic precedent rather than to abstract principles, and aims at the realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good.

**Wolfers (1962: 58) on necessity and morality:** The ‘necessities’ in international politics and for that matter in all spheres of life do not push decision and action beyond the realm of moral judgement; they rest on moral choice themselves.

**Kennan (1996: 270) on the amorality of reason of state:** The interests of the national society for which government must concern itself are basically those of its military security, the integrity of its

**political life, and the well-being of its people. These needs have no moral quality. They arise from the very existence of the national state and from the status of national sovereignty it enjoys. They are the unavoidable necessities of a national existence and therefore not subject to classification as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’.**

**Morgenthau ([1973](#): 12) on prudence: There can be no political morality without prudence; that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action. Realism, then, considers prudence ... to be the supreme virtue in politics.**

**Box 3.5: Case study**

**Realism and the Iraq War**

It may seem curious, but realists have often been outspoken critics of war, especially ‘unnecessary wars’. In early 2003, before the United States launched its war against Iraq (19 March 2003), John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt ([2003](#)), two prominent US realists, published a powerful critique of the neoconservative case for war. They rejected claims made by the Bush administration that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq could not be managed through a policy of containment. However deplorable it might have been, they argued, Hussein’s past

behavior was not irrational. Though a brutal dictator with a history of aggression (the Iran–Iraq War 1980–88 and the Gulf War 1990–91), Hussein would remain able to be deterred, even in the event of acquiring a chemical or nuclear weapons capability. ‘Why? Because the United States and its regional allies are far stronger than Iraq’ ([2003](#): 59).

Mearsheimer also argued elsewhere ([2005](#)) that this critique of the Iraq War was consistent with Hans Morgenthau’s critique of the Vietnam War. The neoconservative case for war, built around Wilsonian idealism ‘with teeth’, failed to appreciate the historical tendency of states to balance against power (rather than bandwagon), and failed to recognise nationalism as a more powerful ideological force than democracy. Following Morgenthau, Mearsheimer emphasised the dangers of pursuing global crusades (whether against [communism](#) or for democracy). Mearsheimer concluded that Morgenthau ‘would have opposed [the Iraq War] as well if he had been alive’.

For realists, IR theories built on an ethic of conviction cannot solve the dilemmas and paradoxes of international politics. Hence the ethic of responsibility is the proper political ethic, and prudence, as the judging of consequences of different political actions, is the supreme moral virtue in politics. The distinction between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of conviction, which has been made by Max Weber ([1948](#)) can be considered a lasting – albeit inconclusive – word from realism about the morality of states.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that, despite some differences among realists, realism offers a range of concepts and ideas to capture enduring, if tragic, aspects of international relations. But we have also understood that the barycentre of realism is historical continuity. This reveals a tendency to occlude a crucial dimension of international relations: change (Ruggie [1983](#)). Theories influenced by the ‘critical turn’ (Marxism, critical theory, postmodernism, feminism and constructivism) and liberalism are sceptical about realism’s assumption of anarchy’s historical permanence, and inquire into logics of transformation and potentials for change neglected by realism.

States continue to be the dominant political units in international relations and do not show much inclination to abandon their sovereign powers or to convert international anarchy into some kind of world government. On the contrary, they seem to sustain the logic of international anarchy that realists describe. In international relations, power and its immediate expression – force – remain central preoccupations. Demands for justice are commonly outweighed by reasons of state, and human interests are often sacrificed for national interests. These are just some of the reasons why realism remains an indispensable tradition of thought for any student of international relations today.

### **Discussion questions**

**3.1** What is international anarchy and why is it a fundamental element of realism?

**3.2** According to realists, what was the most flawed assumption of so-called ‘idealist’ thinkers? Why?

**3.3** Why do realists view international relations as a ‘realm of recurrence and repetition’?

**3.4** What are the main differences between classical realism and neo-realism?

**3.5** Realism is often accused of being immoral. Why? Do you agree with this accusation?

### *Further reading*

Aron, Raymond 1966, *Peace and war: A theory of international relations*, New York: Doubleday. *A twentieth-century realist classic by leading French intellectual.*

Bell, Duncan (ed.) 2009, *Political thought and international relations: Variations on a realist theme*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An excellent collection of essays interpreting and examining the complex and rich contribution of realism.*

Buzan, Barry, Jones, Charles and Little, Richard 1993, *The logic of anarchy: Neorealism to structural realism*, New York: Columbia University Press. *An attempt to make neo-realism methodologically open and historically sensitive.*

Haslam, Jonathan 2002, *No virtue like necessity: Realist thought in international relations since Machiavelli*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. *A wide-ranging history of realist thought.*

Keohane, Robert (ed.) 1986, *Neorealism and its critics*, New York: Columbia University Press. *As the title suggests, this is a collection of some of the most*

*important neo-realist authors and their critics.*

Smith, Michael J. 1986, *Realist thought from Weber to Kissinger*, Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press. *An important account of political realism in the twentieth century.*

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## 4

# Marxism and critical theory



**Jim George, Richard Devetak and Martin Weber**

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## Introduction

This chapter introduces students to the rich and controversial legacy of Marxism and one of its major offshoots in the twentieth century, critical theory. The chapter is presented in two parts. The first touches on the historical and intellectual context that ‘created’ Marxism, Marx’s notion of historical materialism and the issue of how Marx’s ideas have been received in IR. The second part concentrates on the two strands of critical theory that have emerged

within IR: one derived from the so-called Frankfurt School and the other from Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci.

## **Historical and intellectual context: Marx and the critique of capitalism**

During the nineteenth century, European societies underwent dramatic and sometimes traumatic changes internally while expanding their colonial rule to almost every corner of the world. Importantly, this expansion of European [imperialism](#) and the global consolidation of what is often referred to as the ‘Westphalian states-system’ occurred simultaneously with the comprehensive shift to industrialised production (known as the Industrial Revolution), significant changes in the ownership and control of property and large-scale population transfers, both internally and externally towards parts of the colonised world. By the nineteenth century economic affairs were also changing significantly, with the gradual demise of [mercantilism](#) and the rise of [capitalism](#). Victorian Britain (England, specifically) had emerged as the hotbed of these developments, with its extraordinary innovations in industrial production and technology, and in the capitalist production process. It also provided many of the conceptual principles for understanding and legitimising the socio-economic transformations inaugurated by capitalism.

At the intellectual core of this major historical transformation were philosophers such as Adam Smith (1723–90) in the eighteenth century and David Ricardo (1772–1823) in the nineteenth century, who helped develop what became known as the liberal ‘political economy’. An outgrowth of moral philosophy, this field of inquiry was concerned primarily with the political and

economic conditions of social change. It also became the basis for the discipline of (neoclassical) economics.

The new political economists advanced more stringent conceptions of 'efficiency' under capitalism. Arguing against the accumulated wealth and land ownership of the traditional aristocracy, they insisted wealth must be circulated and invested across the whole society. In this regard, they were advocates for an 'entrepreneurial' shift from subsistence economies to industrial production, and for social progress guided by scientific reason.

The optimism and pragmatism of these liberal political economists, however, ran into some rather stark practical problems during the course of the nineteenth century. Workers organised to contest their often meagre wages and workplace conditions within the rapidly expanding capitalist system and industrialists increasingly became involved in disputes and confrontations with their often hungry and desperate labourers. In short, what the liberal political economists had advanced in theory as a system of symmetrical contract relations between capital and labour turned out in practice to be a highly explosive mix of social unrest and oppression.

Into this situation came Karl Marx (1818–83) and his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels (1820–95), whose father was a wealthy industrialist in Manchester. Like the liberal political economists whose work they would criticise quite fundamentally, Marx and Engels agreed that industrial development was necessary and desirable, 'because only with this universal development of productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established' (Marx [1977](#): 171). Where they disagreed with their liberal (or, as they preferred to call them, bourgeois) counterparts was regarding the social and political relations that attended the modernisation process. They wanted to develop what might be called a 'critical social theory' that would overcome capitalism's intolerable excesses, yet harness modernity's progressive forces to

the welfare of all. Capitalism – defined as a social system based on the accumulation of capital or the extraction of surplus value – therefore formed the central object of Marx’s critique, while modernisation in general was understood as an integral feature of a fairer, more democratic future for humankind.

In late 1849, Marx arrived in England, convinced the contradictions of capitalist societies like the United Kingdom would explode into crisis and lead to the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist class rule and its replacement by more equitable and democratic political societies. Marx acknowledged that this was to be a complex and difficult struggle, in his view bourgeois capitalism was preparing its own demise due to its rapacious and exploitative behaviour. As Marx and Engels dramatically put it in ‘The Communist Manifesto’: ‘What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers’ ([1977 \[1848\]](#): 231).

Some key features of Marx’s thought (see [Box 4.1](#)) can be gleaned from the above discussion. First, it emphasises the negative consequences of industrialised capitalism without completely dismissing its latent potential for an [emancipated](#), post-capitalist society. Second, its critique of capitalism is focused on the (unequal, exploitative) social relations of capitalism rather than the industrialised productive forces of modernity per se. Third, it insists that a small wealthy minority – the owners and controllers of the means of production – exploit their class power in their domination of the great majority of workers. Fourth, it understands liberalism not as a neutral or objective theory, but as the ideology of capitalism and ruling class power – designed to legitimate and conceal the true nature of capitalism’s relations of domination, exploitation and alienation.



**Figure 4.1** Karl Marx, 1867

**Box 4.1:** Discussion points

**Key features of Marx's theoretical framework**

- 1** Recognition of industrial modernity's emancipatory potential.
- 2** Critique of capitalism for generating unequal social relations which lead to domination, exploitation and oppression.
- 3** Explanation of class conflict as an outgrowth of power struggles between those who own and control the means of production (the bourgeoisie) and those who do not (the proletariat).
- 4** Critique of liberalism as an ideology that legitimises capitalism.

## 5 Exploration of potential sources of progressive social change.

To explain and counter the political and ideological power of liberal-capitalism, and to explore potential sources of progressive social change, Marx utilised an approach to radical emancipation that identified class conflict and political struggle as the driving forces of history. He called this approach ‘historical materialism’.

### **Marxism as historical materialism**

Both Marx and the liberals shared a commitment to a progressivist conception of history. On this view, history is understood as a progressive unfolding of better and increasingly rational social arrangements in which people could look forward to more fulfilled, more ‘civilised’ lives than previous generations. Capitalism was a crucial driving force in this progressivist narrative, Marx argued, because of its unparalleled capacity to rapidly change the lives and social aspirations of so many people across the industrialising world. As Marx and Engels (1977: 225) pronounced, capitalism’s global expansion in the nineteenth century ‘draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization’. For Marx, though – unlike his liberal counterparts – the capitalist stage of progressive development and its bourgeois ideology could not possibly represent the apex of human achievement – it was too selfish and exploitative for this – and must therefore be superseded by a higher form of productive and social life, initially of a socialist kind and some time later of a communist kind.

Some versions of Marxism speak as if this historical progression is inevitable – as if it is somehow inherent in human relations. But to be fair to Marx, the emphasis in his works is most often on the need for those who seek progressive change to understand the necessity of struggle to achieve it. Those who have power, Marx argued, will not willingly cede it. Consequently, the key to historical and societal change depends upon the organised struggles of the subordinate classes at those historical moments when the defenders of the [status quo](#) are at their most vulnerable – at moments of great class antagonism and crisis.

To help make sense of Marx's theory of historical materialism it is useful to note what makes this theory both materialist and historical. To explain this, Marx famously proclaimed that Hegel's [philosophical idealism](#) needed to be turned on its head. His point was that historical progress was not necessarily derived from successively higher levels of understanding of 'ideas' (via philosophical contestation) that were then transformed into social and political practice over the millennia, as philosophers such as Hegel proposed. Instead, argued Marx, it was the everyday social and political practices of the 'material' world that sparked the great ideas and passions for emancipatory change. Ultimately, suggests Marx, it is the 'way in which men produce their means of subsistence' that is the core of this process, and that involves 'before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing' and so on (Marx [1977](#): 161, 165).

While Marx's materialist perspective does seem to accord ontological primacy to the material dimension of human social life – 'Life is not determined by consciousness', he says, 'but consciousness by life' (Marx [1977](#): 165) – he also recognises the symbiotic relationship between 'ideas' and everyday practices. 'As individuals express their life, so they are,' says Marx ([1977](#): 161). Humans are what they do, and how they conceive of and articulate what they do

can change their lives and their consciousness of life. As the material and ideational bases of the human condition change, history changes and politics acquires new forms.

This suggests that all social and political interactions concerning states, markets, cultures, religions and political institutions must be understood as historical products, not abstract unchanging entities. Marxists insist on seeing these institutions as manifestations of an underlying social whole or totality. To this historical proposition must be added another, which posits the structural constraints, as well as freedoms, of history:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.

(Marx [1977](#): 300)

This proposition has affinities with constructivism (see [Chapter 7](#)), which also recognises that while the worlds of politics and international relations are social and historical productions, they cannot be changed at will.

At the core of Marx's historical materialism is the proposition put most unequivocally in 'The Communist Manifesto' ([1977](#): 222): 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.' This is the organising principle of Marx's revolutionary thinking: that class struggle is the driving force of history, shaping and re-shaping social relations and all the civil and political institutions that grow out of them – not least states, markets and the states-system. By placing class conflict at the centre of his analysis, and by redefining modern politics (the state and states-system) as the class-infused product of an increasingly globalised capitalism, Marx's theory of historical materialism offered a radically different understanding of the modern world and of the evolution of the international system.

## Marx and Marxism in International Relations

Years before he penned his realist classic, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (Carr [1946](#)) renowned realist E.H. Carr wrote *Karl Marx: A Study in Fanaticism* ([1934](#)). This was a largely respectful, if critical, engagement with Marx's life and thought. Of Marx's thinking, Carr ([1934](#): 72–3) said, 'It is a tour de force of unparalleled dexterity and brilliance. It is fascinating to watch the disjointed fragments, marshalled by Marx's ingenious brain, fall into place like pieces of a well-made puzzle. Everything fits, and nothing is superfluous.' Carr's deep interest in Marx may come as a surprise to many, but it should be remembered that [realism](#), like Marxism, is concerned with the material and historical dimensions of conflict and struggles for power. IR realism and Marxism take opposing views on the sources of these conflicts and struggles, but they nonetheless occupy some common ground.

Carr notwithstanding, the general view that IR scholars have taken of Marxism is that it has little or nothing to say about international relations (see Wight [1966](#): 25; Waltz [1979](#): 19). The reasons are obvious: Marx's thinking did not take the state or states-system as its primary focus; it did not take questions of war and peace as its *raison d'être*; and it did not engage extensively with the canonical thinkers usually associated with IR. For these and other reasons, Marxism's focus was long considered extraneous to the traditional agenda of IR. This seemed to be confirmed by the Cold War's ending (see [Chapter 10](#)), and [liberals](#) and capitalists triumphantly claimed that Marxism, like the Soviet Union, had finally been tossed into the dustbin of history.

Rejecting this Cold War rhetoric, Marxist IR scholars have continued to build upon the Marxian theoretical legacy up to the present day. There is much debate in Marxist circles about various elements of this legacy and some quite distinct interpretations of it. But, differences aside, there is general agreement

that the global expansion of the modern state (see [Chapter 11](#)) is inseparable from the development of global capitalism.

Marxist theorists of the state and international relations, including world-systems theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein ([1974](#), [1996](#)), have tended to regard the state and states-system as the political forms of the global capitalist system. Indeed, Wallerstein ([1996](#): 89) argues that the states-system and world economy were born together:

Capitalism and the modern state-system were not two separate historical inventions (or conceptions) that had to be fitted together or articulated with each other. They were obverse sides of a single coin. They were both part of a seamless whole. Neither is imaginable without the other.

Wallerstein's world-systems theory has been criticised by some Marxists for, among other things, economic determinism and failing to grasp the original geopolitical context in which capitalism arose. Two IR scholars in particular have sought to provide more subtle historical accounts of the relationship between the states-system and capitalism: Justin Rosenberg and Benno Teschke.

Rosenberg ([1994](#)) argues in his seminal Marxist account of international relations, *The Empire of Civil Society*, that different historical states-systems are governed by different modes of production, and therefore different social structures. He argues that 'geopolitical systems are not constituted independently of, and cannot be understood in isolation from, the wider structures of the production and reproduction of social life' ([1994](#): 6). He insists that if we remain attentive to structural change, we will see that the eighteenth century gave rise to distinctive new institutional forms, in particular the sovereign state as the modern form of political rule specific to capitalism ([1994](#): 126–9).

In his historical analysis of the transition from feudalism through absolutism to modern capitalism, Teschke ([2004](#)) argues that historical changes in the modern state and states-system are a reflection of the changing ways in

which societies organise their economic lives, especially the way property is conceptualised and distributed. Despite nuanced differences, both Rosenberg and Teschke hold the view that the particular form taken by the state at any moment in time is always an outward reflection or manifestation of capitalism's inner logic, as it interacts with geopolitical logics. This is in keeping with the spirit of Marx's theory of historical materialism: that political and economic institutions are manifestations of changing modes of production.

## **Critical theories of International Relations**

### **Frankfurt School Critical Theory in International Relations**

'[Frankfurt School](#) Critical Theory' is the name given to the Marxist-inspired social and political philosophy that emerged out of the Institute of Social Research established in Frankfurt under the directorship of Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) in 1923. The Institute brought together a number of like-minded scholars and researchers, including such twentieth-century German luminaries as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse (see Held [1980](#); Jay [1973](#)). Although inspired by Marx, Frankfurt School critical theorists were interested in analysing the multiple modes of domination afflicting the modern world – from the psychological to the cultural to the political and economic.

From its inception, critical theory questioned the impact upon social life of positivist theory and scientific-[rationalist](#) modes of inquiry. In particular, it believed that post-Enlightenment modernity had become colonised by a form of instrumental rationality interested only in calculating the efficient means to ends, not evaluating the moral legitimacy of those ends. Instead of assisting humankind's mastery over nature, instrumental rationality had arrested human freedoms and empowered various forms of social domination. For the Frankfurt

School, one of the key tasks of the social philosophy it advocated was to recover alternative forms of rationality with emancipatory potentials. This can be illustrated by referring to a distinction made by Max Horkheimer.

Horkheimer distinguished between ‘traditional’ theory, which is based upon scientific principles of [positivism](#) and [empiricism](#) and is designed to buttress the status quo, and ‘critical theory’, which is based on interpretive and self-reflective methods and is designed not just to ‘describe’ the world but to ‘act as a force within it to stimulate change’ (Horkheimer ([1972](#) [[1937](#)]: 215). In this regard, Horkheimer was paying homage to Marx’s ‘11th Thesis on Feuerbach’: ‘philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it’ (Marx [1977](#): 158). A very similar distinction has been proposed in IR by Robert W. Cox, although he has confessed to having had no knowledge of Horkheimer or the Frankfurt School when he coined the distinction between critical and problem-solving theories (see [Box 4.2](#)).

#### **Box 4.2: Terminology**

##### **Cox on critical and problem-solving theories**

In his seminal 1981 *Millennium* article, Robert W. Cox proposed a distinction between what he called ‘problem-solving theory’ and ‘critical theory’.

- *Problem-solving theory* is based on positivist methods and oriented to maintaining the prevailing structures of social power, or at least working within the constraints of the present system to smooth over any problems or crises. ‘It takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which it is organised, as the given framework of action’ (Cox [1981](#): 128).

- *Critical theory*, as Cox portrays it, is based on historical materialism and seeks more radical transformations that will enhance the global conditions for freedom and democracy. It does not take the prevailing order of social and power relationships and institutions as the given framework for action, but ‘asks how that order came about’, calls that order into question, and enquires ‘whether [it] might be in the process of changing’ (Cox [1981](#): 129).

Cox denied that knowledge of the social world could be neutral or objective in any genuine sense, despite mainstream theorists’ claims to the contrary. As Cox put it in his oft-cited proposition, ‘theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose’ ([1981](#): 128). In other words, all theory derives from a perspective or position in the social world, is embedded in social relations that characterise the political and ideological order at any given time, and thus cannot claim to be ‘divorced from a standpoint in time and space’ (Cox [1981](#): 128). Critical theories, including feminism, Marxism and postmodernism, are usually quite open and explicit about the position, perspective and interest of their theories.

Jürgen Habermas (1929– ) is the most famous of the second-generation Frankfurt School scholars to have continued the project of critical theory. He has remained committed to the idea that societies can undergo social learning or normative development, by which he means improving the human capacity to devise social and political arrangements built on principles of justice, democracy and the rule of law. He has argued persistently that politics can always be

analysed and evaluated from a ‘moral point of view’. It is the recovery and clarification of this normative or moral perspective in politics that critical theories of IR have embraced.

In his early writings, Habermas ([1972](#)) focused on how we acquire knowledge and how this knowledge is shaped by prior interests of which we are often unaware. He sought to illustrate how particular ‘knowledge [constitutive](#) interests’ shape and limit the way in which people think and act. Habermas differentiated three kinds of knowledge based on underlying interest or purpose, all of which are crucial to a healthy, functioning society:

- *instrumental* – referring to ‘scientific’ knowledge regarding human relations with nature
- *strategic* – referring to ‘political’ knowledge aimed at coordinating human action for particular social purposes
- *emancipatory* – referring to knowledge directed at overcoming coercive or oppressive social and political relations (see [Table 4.1](#)).

**Table 4.1** Knowledge and interests

<b>Knowledge constitutive interest</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>IR theory</b>
Instrumental or technical	Achieving technical control over natural and social environments	Positivist and empiricist	Neo-realism, neoliberalism
Strategic or practical	Achieving a framework of mutual	<a href="#">Hermeneutic</a> and interpretive	Classical realism, English School, constructivism

	understanding and coordination for social interaction		
Emancipatory	Achieving freedom and autonomy from various forms of domination and exclusion	Self-reflective	Marxism, feminism, critical theory, postmodernism

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The first significant effort to introduce Habermasian ideas into IR was undertaken by Richard Ashley ([1981](#)). In this work Ashley used the ‘knowledge constitutive interests’ framework to argue for critical reflection on the guiding assumptions and interests of the two dominant IR theories, [neo-realism](#) and [neoliberalism](#). Both theories, argued Ashley, provide important explanations of the way the world works, at least from the viewpoint of the dominant states in the states-system and global economy – explanations they tend to represent as reality; and both underpin their explanations with an objectivist and ‘scientific’ [ontology](#) (see [Chapter 1](#)).

What was missing from these dominant IR theories, Ashley insisted, was an ‘emancipatory’ interest in changing the system in order to remove the sources of domination and cultivate freedom and democracy (see Devetak [2013a](#); [2017](#)). Ashley ([1984](#)) was subsequently to shift his thinking in line with [postmodern](#) perspectives (see [Chapter 6](#)), but his early engagement with Frankfurt School Critical Theory represented an important breakthrough in the development of critical diversity in IR theory in the twenty-first century (see [Chapter 1](#)).

The influence of Habermas and Frankfurt School Critical Theory has been growing in IR since the 1980s, with many scholars engaging Frankfurt School

themes and methods to analyse world politics (see Bohman [2010](#); Crawford [2009](#); Devetak [2007](#); George [1994](#); Hoffman [1987](#); Hutchings [2005](#); Levine [2012](#); Neufeld [1995](#); Roach [2010](#); Martin Weber [2005](#)).

Utilising themes drawn from Kant and Habermas, Andrew Linklater ([1990](#), [1996](#), [1998](#), [2007](#)) has pushed the emancipatory theme further in the post-Cold War era, focusing in particular on the enhanced prospects for democratic dialogue in a world where individuals are reformulating and expanding their sense of self and global identity (see [Box 4.3](#)). Linklater's critical theory adopts a cosmopolitan ethic in this regard that reaffirms the multiple communities to which people increasingly belong or with which they feel solidarity. This has become particularly pertinent at a time when several Western governments are adopting increasingly exclusionary positions and pandering to chauvinistic nationalism with fear-mongering. Such governments are fuelling contempt for liberal democracy, human rights and the judiciary with the intention of dismantling the normative foundations on which Western states have been built as well as the principles to which they have subscribed in international relations. The intent, in other words, is to combat the cosmopolitanism advocated by critical theory (Devetak [2007](#); Shapcott [2000](#)).

#### **Box 4.3:** Discussion points

##### **Kant, Habermas and Linklater on normative justification**

Kant's ([1987 \[1785\]](#): 27, 58) categorical imperative: 'I am never to act otherwise than so *that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.*' He later presented an alternative formulation: '*So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.*'

Habermas' (1998: 41) discourse ethics: 'Only those norms can claim validity that could meet with the acceptance of all concerned in practical discourse'.

Linklater's (1998: 96) dialogical ethics: 'The widening of the circle of those who have rights to participate in dialogue and the commitment that norms cannot be regarded as universally valid unless they have, or could command, the consent of all those who stand to be affected by them.'

Intrinsic to critical theory's cosmopolitan ethic is a desire to overcome the 'moral deficits' created by gendered, economic, cultural and political exclusions. The modern state and states-system have certainly contributed to these exclusions, but they have also enshrined a range of rights and freedoms both domestically and internationally, including international measures to reduce harm – what Linklater (2001; 2011) calls 'cosmopolitan harm conventions'. The political goal of critical theory's cosmopolitanism is to enlarge the spheres of freedom, democracy and equality by creating appropriate constitutional arrangements for states in a reconstructed, post-[Westphalian](#) world order (Linklater, 1998: Chapter 6). These concerns for a more democratic, more inclusive world order are intrinsic to another critical theory variant in IR derived from the works of Antonio Gramsci.

### **Gramscian critical theory in International Relations**

Sardinian by birth, Gramsci lived a short and dramatic life. He became a major Marxist intellectual and political activist in the period after the Great War when Italy became the violent site of the first [fascist](#) regime in history (1922–44). Arrested in 1926 for his political activities, Gramsci was tortured and mistreated

in prison, dying shortly after his release. But, remarkably, while in prison Gramsci wrote his influential *Prison Notebooks* ([1971](#)), in which he reassessed and reformulated the works of Marx and effectively created another major strand of critical theory.

One of the keystones of Gramsci's reassessment of Marxism, and of the kind of critical theory that bears his name in much contemporary IR, is the notion of [hegemony](#), which affords an understanding of the state as a distinctive mode of rule achieved through the consent the masses give to the social, political and legal ideas and institutions cultivated by the ruling classes. In this way, the state plays an 'educative and formative role' (Gramsci [1971](#): 242) in adapting the populace 'to the necessities of the continuous development of the economic apparatus of production'. It works to create and sustain 'a certain type of civilisation and citizen' ([1971](#): 246).

Through this notion of hegemony, Gramsci redirected Marxist theory to the role of culture and ideology in reproducing the class state under capitalism. The problem with orthodox Marxism, he suggested, was that in focusing on the material base of society at the expense of cultural and ideological superstructure, powerful ideational forces were largely ignored. But these were forces crucial to sustaining the ideology and structures of the capitalist state. For Gramsci, it was important to broaden our understanding of the mode of production beyond the materialist focus – on the means of production (work and technology) and consumption (buying and selling goods and labour) – to include the cultural and ideological resources used to produce 'a certain type of civilization and citizen' through civil society's educational and formative processes.



**Figure 4.2** Antonio Gramsci in 1915

Robert W. Cox has employed Gramscian themes in his many examinations of the dominant structures and ideologies of the contemporary state system. In so doing, Cox ([1981](#): 139) provides an approach to international relations that focuses on the interplay of ideas, institutions and material capabilities. He insists ([1983](#): 164) that hegemony is not achieved purely with instruments of material power, but is part of a process in which ideas and ideologies socialise states and institutions into adopting certain policies and practices, cultivating certain conceptions of the state's role and purpose, and consenting to certain world order arrangements. Hegemony, as Cox ([1987](#): 7) understands it, is a form of dominance where the pre-eminent state in the international system (the United States) creates a world order consistent with its ideology and values; this serves to maintain the pre-eminence of that state and its ruling classes, yet is able to secure some degree of consent from other states and classes by offering 'some measure or prospect of satisfaction to the less powerful'.

It is in this context more generally that neo-Gramscian analysis has concentrated on the potentials that might exist for counterhegemonic responses in IR. A primary focus since the 1990s has been the crisis and transformation of *pax Americana* triggered by globalisation and the rise of neoliberal economics (see Bieler and Morton [2004](#); De Graff and van Apeldoorn [2011](#); Gill [1990](#), [1993](#), [1995](#); Robinson [2014](#); Rupert [1995](#); Saull [2012](#)). The central critical proposition here is that a global ‘common sense’ has been constructed around the deregulation of trade and finance – what Gill ([1995](#)) refers to as ‘market civilization’ – which, while claiming to serve global interests, in fact serves to consolidate and enhance the power and prosperity of the major states and global corporations. At the apex of this process is the United States, which, in addition to its unrivalled military and economic power, utilises its extensive reserves of *soft power* (from political and diplomatic influence to the cultural power exercised through its music and film industries) to embed its ideology and ideas in global economic institutions (GEIs) (see [Chapter 25](#)) that support world order arrangements favourable to its hegemony.

It is this dimension of hegemonic rule that is perceived as particularly problematic for the United States as it faces a ‘legitimation crisis’ concerning both its strategic and economic behaviour around the world. There was a brief moment of triumphalism after the Cold War when a liberal-capitalist ‘common sense’ was lauded as universally necessary and desirable (Fukuyama [1989](#)), but since then, thanks to neoconservative belligerence, disastrous engagements in the Middle East and in Central Asia, and the increasing antagonisms between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in the neoliberal global marketplace, a variety of actors and movements have begun to challenge the US-led world order and its hegemonic ideology (see Hardt and Negri [2004](#)).

The result has been the rise of various ‘counterhegemonic’ forces of the ‘left’ (e.g. global labour movements, social movements, women’s movements,

indigenous movements and environmental movements) and, more worryingly for neo-Gramscians, a resurgence of right-wing forces that have skilfully and effectively appropriated the misery and concerns of the ‘losers’ for their own (anti-democratic, anti-progressivist) purposes. In response to this, neo-Gramscians have utilised central themes in Gramscian theory to explain and potentially change the nature and direction of the current hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism.

### **Neo-Gramscianism and the ‘organic crisis’ of neoliberalism**

From a neo-Gramscian – and more generally Marxist – perspective, the contemporary neoliberal crisis, which has seen accelerated levels of poverty, a breakdown of traditional attitudes and loyalties concerning the democratic system and increasing anxieties about migration and social cohesion, is not unexpected. Rather, crisis is perceived as inherent within a capitalist system that is reproduced through class exploitation and competition between capitalists at all levels – from individuals to corporations to states – and that regularly requires hegemonic repair.

For neo-Gramscians, however, the present crisis has a particular resonance, for two reasons: first, because Gramscians conceptualise it as an ‘organic’ crisis – a deeply structural, multifaceted crisis of the system as a whole that might be beyond the ruling class’s ability to control via a pragmatic, adapted ‘common sense’; and second, because there has been no meaningful attempt on the part of neoliberals to seriously engage this process. Instead, neoliberals have largely turned away from the opportunity to renew and reformulate the hegemonic project and have accelerated hard-line austerity programs designed to further cut public spending (e.g. on health, education and social welfare) and further embed policies of privatisation, deregulation and free trade. In so doing, they

increasingly have detached vast numbers of people from the ideological ‘common sense’ crucial to hegemonic stability and longevity (Robinson [2014](#)).

This was actually a central issue in Gramsci’s analysis of the organic crisis of the 1920s, when he considered that the ‘morbid symptoms’ of that age in Europe – a Great Depression, the breakdown of social, cultural and religious order after World War I, the rise of fascism – might spark a successful revolutionary moment and a new progressive age of political radicalism and enhanced democracy. It was even more so when it became clear that many of the traditional ruling classes were only able to maintain control by aligning themselves, to one degree or another, with right-wing forces, but were ultimately unable to reintegrate masses of confused, angry and marginalised peoples into a new hegemonic order and were themselves often swept up into a Fascist maelstrom and another World War.

After World War II, a new hegemonic order was institutionalised, a new level of ideological consent was achieved and a new ‘common sense’ was installed – one that celebrated ‘capitalism with a human face’ as the systemic norm in Western liberal democracies. Yet, by the 1970s, another major crisis had beset the Western capitalist world when the anxieties around ‘stagflation’ led to social upheaval, weakening of the [Keynesian](#) consensus (in which government, business and unions agreed to cooperate in a system of mutual benefit and social democracy), renewed conflict between capital and labour, and the opportunity for a more zealous ‘market’ liberalism (neoliberalism) to supersede the post-war ‘mixed economy’.

Reaching its apogee in the Reagan and Thatcher era of the 1980s, this neoliberal hegemony and its particular ‘common sense’ (centred on individualist rationality, entrepreneurship, consumerism and free trade) has gained its primary support from a ‘contented class’ that has taken advantage of its privileged position in the contemporary age of globalisation (Harvey [2005](#): 42). At its core

is a smaller, mega-rich grouping – the 1 per cent – which in the United States is now a wealthier minority than that which dominated the American economy on the eve of the Great Depression in 1929. This is a theme that is evident across the globe, with the richest 1 per cent now controlling 43 per cent of all the world's assets – and the poorest 50 per cent owning just 2 per cent (Di Falco [2014](#)).

The problems for the neoliberal hegemonic project, then, have not come from an inability to reward its major support base economically, but rather from the damage done to its 'commonsense' ideology more generally. As Gramsci made clear, this is because the key to hegemonic power is the *consent of the ruled to be ruled* – or, more precisely, it derives from the perception on the part of those in the subordinate classes that *their* interests are also being served by the 'system' and that they have a meaningful stake in it. This was largely the case in the early years of the neoliberal project, when the notion of 'trickle down' held aspirational hope for many and when the TINA (there is no alternative) assertion seemed merely a statement of fact – indeed, of 'common sense'. Since the 1990s, however, faith in 'trickle down' has dwindled and the search for alternatives has accelerated the shift from mainstream political loyalties and behaviour.

A 'discontented class' has thus emerged around the Western world and beyond it, comprised largely of those not structurally or educationally advantaged by the neoliberal world order, which has seen its incomes, working conditions and social opportunities deteriorate markedly and which has experienced increased levels of alarm and anxiety about the capitalist system, about its democratic institutions and, ultimately, about everyday life in a neoliberal world order. Importantly, too, the fate of the 'discontented class' is not restricted to traditionally subordinate groupings. Instead, growing sections of the middle class – particularly since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008 –

have seen their previously comfortable lifestyles increasingly threatened under conditions of budget austerity, stagnating economies and the downsizing of the public sector (Standing [2011](#)).

It is this facet of the present crisis that is most interesting for neo-Gramscians, who see in the challenges to neoliberal capitalism by a diversity of progressive political groups (e.g. Syriza in Greece, the Indignados and Podemos in Spain, the ‘Occupy’ movement, Bernie Sanders in the United States) a serious questioning of neoliberal hegemony and of the productive and ideological forces that underpin it. As Gramsci warned in the 1920s, however, at a time of organic crisis, in which ‘the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born’ (Gramsci [1971](#): 275–6), there are no guarantees that confused, angry and desperate societies will choose rational, democratic answers to complex questions over the ostensibly simple solutions of the extreme right.

Marxist scholars have sought to provide a coherent theoretical explanation of these important issues on the contemporary global agenda. This in itself is perhaps indicative of the continuing relevance and value of Marxist thinking on these issues. But Marxists, by definition, cannot be satisfied with merely ‘interpreting’ the world – for, as Marx insisted, ‘the point is to change it’.

Neo-Marxists in particular have begun to think through this process by acknowledging that globalisation has created new forms of class domination and new and more complex categories of those subordinated by it. Acknowledged, too, is that the struggles of class, power and social justice that have animated Marxist thinking since the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century are now necessarily global struggles. As William Robinson ([2014](#): 236–8) has put it, ‘struggles at the nation state level are far from futile ... but any such struggles must be part of a more expansive transnational counterhegemonic project’. For Gramscians, the struggle to counter xenophobia, extreme nationalism and racism requires a ‘transnational class consciousness ... that links the local to the

national, the national to the global'. It is a struggle with fascinating dimensions for students of IR in the twenty-first century that offers particularly valuable conceptual resources for thinking about IR theory in a radically different way.

## **Conclusion**

For most of the Cold War era, Marxism occupied the fringes of IR (Kubáľková and Cruickshank [1985](#)). More recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in Marx's works – particularly his detailed critiques of capitalism, which for many contain valuable insights into contemporary globalisation. In this chapter, we have touched on some elements of the Marxist approach to IR as it has been carried forward and modified by Frankfurt School and neo-Gramscian versions of critical theory. In this regard, we have demonstrated how, in an era of increasing global poverty and multiple crises throughout the capitalist world economy, Marxism and critical theory can provide insightful critical engagements with the questions of domination, inequality and exclusion that characterise the present global order.

## **Discussion questions**

- 4.1** What is capitalism? Why are Marxists so critical of it?
- 4.2** How do Marxists understand the relationship between the capitalist world economy and the states-system?
- 4.3** What assumptions, if any, are shared by realism, liberalism and Marxism? How does Marxism differ from these mainstream theories?
- 4.4** What are the distinct characteristics of historical materialism?

4.5 Why do critical theorists focus on the interests underlying theories?

4.6 What are the major problems of the Westphalian world order as identified by Linklater and Cox?

### *Further reading*

Anievas, Alexander (ed.) 2010, *Marxism and world politics: Contesting global capitalism*, London: Routledge. *A very useful and accessible collection of essays on the Marxist contribution to IR.*

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Cox, Robert W. and Sinclair, Timothy 1995, *Approaches to world order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An extremely readable and useful volume of Cox's essays; helpful for his explication of neo-Gramscian critical theory.*

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Devetak, Richard 2017, *Critical international theory: An intellectual history*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An intellectual history that contextualises the emergence of critical international theory in the Enlightenment, German idealism and the Frankfurt School.*

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Held, David 1980, *Introduction to critical theory*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. *A good book-length introduction to Frankfurt School critical theory.*

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Linklater, Andrew 1990, *Beyond realism and Marxism: Critical theory and international relations*, London: Macmillan. *A pioneering contribution to critical theory of IR, which is also very useful in surveying Marxist literature and linking it to IR.*

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Linklater, Andrew 2007, *Critical theory and world politics: Citizenship*,

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*sovereignty and humanity*, London: Routledge. *A collection of essays on a range of themes central to IR and critical theory.*

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Roach, Steven C. (ed.) 2008, *Critical theory and international relations: A reader*, London: Routledge. *A comprehensive range of articles and chapters from Kant, Hegel and Marx, through the Frankfurt School to critical theorists of IR.*

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Stedman Jones, Gareth 2016, *Karl Marx: Greatness and illusion*, London: Allen Lane. *A magisterial biography of Marx that places the man and his ideas in their historical context.*

5

# Feminism



**Katrina Lee-Koo**

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[Feminist interventions into international relations](#)

[The feminist International Relations agenda](#)

[Challenging the masculine bias in International Relations](#)

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[\*J. Ann Tickner: Progress towards gender equality in the academy and  
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## Introduction

This chapter examines a number of feminist approaches to the study and practice of international relations. It highlights the similarities between these approaches, but also the differences. First, it traces the interventions made by feminists into international relations and the creation of a distinctly feminist agenda. Second, it uses the ‘gender lens’ to demonstrate and analyse how experiences and understandings in international relations can be ‘gendered’. Finally, it explains and examines the critiques of the different feminist approaches to international relations.

## **Feminist interventions into international relations**

On a global level, significant inequality remains between women and men. This is evident in many areas of politics, including political participation in governments and political decision-making realms, ownership of wealth and resources, and access to human rights and justice. The goal of feminist IR is to highlight, understand and address this inequality. It also seeks to encourage the discipline of IR to recognise and better understand the role of gender politics in shaping how we think about the world and the people and institutions in it. Consequently, like international relations generally, feminist IR is a broad and diverse field of study, rich with debate, controversy, cutting-edge research and challenging new [methodological](#) approaches. Feminist IR scholars are often necessarily interdisciplinary, synthesising IR with gender, cultural and post-colonial studies as well as history, sociology, international law and political theory. Feminist scholars have made important contributions to all areas of international relations, including [theory](#), security studies, peace and conflict

studies, foreign policy analysis, the international political economy and global governance.

While feminist international relations encompasses numerous [feminisms](#) based on distinct theoretical approaches, feminist IR scholars have a common commitment: to highlight and address the discrimination and disadvantage that women in particular experience in international politics. Thus feminist IR scholars are concerned primarily with how the study and practice of international politics discriminates against women and leads to disadvantage (see [Box 5.1](#)).

### **Box 5.1:** Discussion points

#### **Feminist International Relations**

Feminists contribute to a broader international relations analysis in at least two ways:

**1** by offering a broader set of issues to consider, including:

- issues of gender-based inequality
- issues that disproportionately impact women
- issues that have a different impact on men and women, and

**2** by offering new ways of thinking about existing international relations concerns – for example by asking the following questions:

- Are dominant ways of thinking about states, power, cooperation and the use of force in international relations particularly masculine and if so, do they exclude other ways of thinking about global crisis and community?
- How do women uniquely adapt to global events such as climate change, disaster or other humanitarian crises in ways that help

their communities to endure? Should these approaches be better supported or replicated on a larger scale?

## **The feminist International Relations agenda**

Feminist IR examines a vast range of issues covering women (and men) from different social, political and economic backgrounds. Its agenda begins by establishing a broader set of issues to analyse: first, it highlights and examines cases of gender inequality between men and women (such as the disparities in political representation in parliaments, the distribution of wealth or the gender pay gap); second, it looks at issues that disproportionately affect women but have remained largely neglected by IR scholars (such as the human trafficking of women for the purposes of sexual slavery or the feminisation of labour in low-paid industries such as textiles and clothing); third, it explores the ways in which key issues in IR (such as conflict or disaster) differently affect men and women. In short, the feminist IR agenda examines men's and women's experiences of [war](#), [peace](#), [democracy](#), governance, economics, development, justice, [security](#) and health at a global level. A focus on these topics, with gender at the forefront, promotes a rich agenda of important issues that often are neglected by mainstream approaches to IR.

For example, by considering gender equality in global politics, we can reveal the extent to which women are often disadvantaged. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women reported in June 2016 that only 22.8 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women. Globally, women are paid less than men, with women earning on average only 60 to 75 per cent of men's

wages. Women continue to do the majority of unpaid work (such as caring, housework, subsistence farming and agricultural work). This discrimination is also reflected in access to education, healthcare, land ownership and legal rights. Feminists argue that the causes of this discrimination can be social, cultural, structural and institutional. For instance, there are many reasons why women are less likely to be landowners. These reasons could include discriminatory laws relating to land ownership, inheritance rights and divorce settlements within a country. If a majority of women's work has been unpaid or casualised, then women might not have the capacity to access credit. Finally, there might be social and cultural practices that inhibit women's abilities to access their rights or discourage them from buying property. An understanding of these issues has led to programs designed to empower women economically and challenge biased social values, legal structures and institutions. One such program is the use of microfinance (small loans) to women to support engagement in their local economy. These loans are designed to support women to build businesses, stabilise their income, improve their standard of living and gain independence. Thus the feminist IR agenda seeks to identify patterns of discrimination, explain their causes and promote solutions.

Second, the feminist agenda considers issues that disproportionately affect women but have remained largely unexamined in IR. An example of this is the global campaign to stop violence, including sexual violence, against civilian women during times of conflict. The reason why this is considered to be gender-based violence is because it specifically targets women *because* they are women. Feminists have argued that violence against women is often a deliberate strategy of war that can be used to achieve a range of political or military goals, including intelligence-gathering, enforcing the compliance of a civilian community, as part of genocidal campaigns or as a psychological weapon. For instance, the United Nations notes that between 100 000 and 250 000 women were raped during the

three months of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, and around 60 000 women were raped in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia (1992–95). In 2016, the UN Secretary-General reported that ‘widespread and systematic sexual violence’ continued in the IS controlled areas of Syria and Iraq (S/2016/361). Research by feminist IR scholars on this topic has raised awareness and increased understanding of the experiences of women in conflict, which in turn also contributes to our overall understanding of conflict. For example, these arguments have been accepted by the international community and have led to the prosecution of war rape as a crime against humanity and a crime of [genocide](#) at the international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (established in 1993) and Rwanda (established in 1994). In 2016, for the first time, the International Criminal Court passed a guilty verdict for perpetrating rape as an act of war.

Finally, feminist IR scholars are interested in how the same global challenges affect men and women in different ways. For example, forced displacement, pandemics, climate change and natural disasters will uniquely affect men and women. This is usually because of their different levels of social, political and economic power, as well as the social expectations of their behaviour. For instance, while HIV/AIDS affects both men and women, vulnerabilities to infection can be shaped by gender. Women are vulnerable because they often have less social, cultural and political power to negotiate safe sex and to access redress for rape and sexual abuse. Understanding men’s and women’s different vulnerabilities is essential to addressing the root causes for the spread of the disease. In another example, natural disasters can have a unique impact upon women that isn’t always considered when the international community plans relief and recovery operations. For example, in 2010 Haiti experienced a devastating earthquake that killed at least 90 000 people, followed by a cholera outbreak that killed 10 000 people, and most recently a cyclone in

2016 that claimed close to 900 lives and displaced at least 15 000 people. While these events have devastated the lives of men and women throughout the country, it affected the sexes differently. In some cases, women had less mobility to evacuate from severe weather events as they were caring for the young and elderly, and it may have been unsafe or impossible for them to travel independently. Moreover, during and immediately after the emergency, women became particularly vulnerable to trafficking and sexual and gender-based violence, and experienced discrimination in efforts to access healthcare and humanitarian relief. Moreover, the specific needs of women's health (such as maternal and reproductive health and healthcare after sexual violence) and issues of women's safety (such as protection from violence in the displaced persons camps) were not addressed adequately despite the widespread international relief effort. Feminists are interested in studying these differences to ensure that the needs of both women and men are understood and met adequately (see [Box 5.2](#)).

#### **Box 5.2: Discussion points**

##### **The goals of feminist International Relations theory**

- 1** To highlight and challenge the way international relations privileges certain masculine identities and ways of knowing.
- 2** To examine the roles and experiences of women in international politics.
- 3** To analyse how gender is constructed and the consequences this has for men and women in international politics.
- 4** To examine the relationships within and between masculinity, femininity, men and women.

## Challenging the masculine bias in International Relations

Feminists have not only added to the agenda of IR, they have also challenged the ways in which we think about it. In the early 1990s, feminists began to make their mark in international relations. One of the first goals of these scholars was to highlight what they saw as the masculine bias of the core assumptions and concepts of the discipline. Important contributions like Jan Jindy Pettman's *Worlding Women* ([1996](#)) and J. Ann Tickner's *Gender in International Relations* ([1992](#)) demonstrated how the theories and practices of international relations reflected and respected the experiences of certain men and certain masculine qualities. For example, one of the first achievements of feminist engagement in international relations was its questioning of [realism](#)'s 'rational man' as the basis of international life. It argued that the 'rational man' model of human nature (which is self-serving, aggressive, competitive and warlike) does not speak for many women – or indeed many men (Tickner [1992](#): Chapter 2). Similarly, these feminists argue that the 'important concerns' of international politics, such as [states](#), [sovereignty](#), [anarchy](#) and military power, all reflect, to the neglect of alternatives, masculine ways of knowing and masculine traits. Indeed, they reflect a particular kind of masculinity – a [hegemonic](#) masculinity that prefers aggressive and liberal/realist ways of thinking about the world. Feminist IR scholars argue that this is why mainstream accounts of international relations typically feature elite men and their experiences in war, statecraft and diplomacy.

For feminist IR scholars, however, this only accounts for part of the story of international relations. After all, there are far more examples of states peacefully

negotiating potential disputes than there are of war. Similarly, global relations are not confined to Europe and North America, as is sometimes implied by the discipline's grand narratives. A key goal of feminist theorising, therefore, is first to demonstrate how this masculine bias operates in such a way that it often privileges and promotes certain actors and experiences, and second to reject the claim that these are universal experiences. Consequently, much feminist international relations scholarship is directed towards uncovering the experiences of people who are hidden by this masculine bias.

## **Where are the women?**

A key goal of feminist research is to correct the male-centric bias in international relations by asking 'Where are the women?' and then redressing this imbalance by incorporating women's experiences into any analysis of international relations. Groundbreaking works such as Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* ([1990](#)) reveal that women play important roles in international relations. In addition to the popularly known stories of Western women as nurses and factory workers during wartime, feminists point out that women, in their everyday lives, are also agents and activists in war, in the international political economy and in the search for peace, security and reconciliation. Enloe argues that the lives of ordinary women can provide useful insights into how international relations operates. For instance, a young Mexican woman working as a cleaner in a New York hotel may not appear to be a major actor in international relations. However, an analysis of her life can tell us a great deal about the workings of state relations, the international political economy, migration, globalisation, the politics of labour and gender relations. In this sense, she is an important agent of international politics. Similarly, women have played

a significant role in attempting to end the conflict in Syria since its outbreak in 2011. In local communities, women and women's groups have organised non-violent protests, negotiated ceasefires, distributed food and medical aid, tried to defuse sectarian divides and sought to combat moves towards violent extremism. Yet, despite this, there were no women representatives in the first two rounds of official peace talks in Geneva to end the conflict.

Consequently, asking 'Where are the women?' offers a fount of empirical knowledge which can be used to analyse and understand international relations, and to advocate for change. In compiling this catalogue of women's experiences, however, feminists have had to employ new kinds of methodologies. First, in order to uncover many of these experiences, it has been necessary to move away from some of the more established ways of research used in mainstream international relations. Feminist IR scholars sometimes rely upon sources of knowledge that are unashamedly subjective, including personal interviews, diaries, letters and memoirs. Furthermore, they use as sources of knowledge people who do not claim to be prominent decision-makers in international relations, but who nonetheless contribute to the practice of international relations and whose lives can be profoundly affected by international relations. Second, feminists often employ a bottom-up, rather than top-down, approach to studying IR. Rather than describing international relations through a grand narrative that analyses the actions and behaviours of whole nation-states in a geopolitical context, these feminists prefer to offer micro-narratives by explaining how individual people, because of their gender, affect or are affected by the behaviours and actions of others.

## **Reconstructing international relations: Examining the differences between sex and**

## gender

For feminists working in international relations, the question then becomes ‘How can we reconstruct the ways in which we study and practise international relations so that the experiences of all people are accounted for and there is no gendered discrimination?’ It is perhaps this project that causes much of the controversy between feminist scholars. For some feminists, it is simply a case of adding women to areas where they are absent, such as in parliaments, militaries, boardrooms, peace negotiations and other positions of power. For other feminists, this cannot be done without first addressing the [patriarchal](#) culture that exists in international relations, and that enables the discrimination to occur in the first place. This controversy surrounds the politics of moving from ‘adding sex empirically’ to ‘analysing gender critically’.

Feminist theories rely upon an understanding of the differences between biological sex and socially constructed gender. These terms are politically loaded and remain contested. The term ‘sex’ is usually used by social scientists to refer to the biological characteristics that are used to define a person predominately as being male or female. However, most feminists argue that gender is an identity that is not biologically determined, but is instead socially constructed. It is a construction that dichotomises identities, behaviours, responsibilities and expectations in society as being not male or female, but rather masculine or feminine.

For example, some may argue that many societies continue to be gendered. This implies that men and women are socially expected to adopt the gendered roles of masculinity and femininity respectively, and to behave in ways that are supposedly appropriate to those roles. This might mean that men are the members of parliament while women are their supportive wives. In this sense, gender is not a biological imperative but a social expectation. Consequently,

when a man or woman steps out of their traditionally defined gendered identity, they appear peculiar or are thought to lack credibility. For instance, in 2016 Hillary Clinton unsuccessfully campaigned to become the first female president of the United States. Throughout the presidential race against Republican opponent Donald Trump, Clinton faced both a gender double-bind and gendered double-standard. The gender double-bind suggests that in campaigning for a traditionally male-dominated role, Clinton needed to carefully modulate her gender performance. If she appeared too feminine, she would not be considered tough enough for the role of president; if she appeared too aggressive, she would not be considered a 'real' woman. This double-bind of being either hysterical and incompetent, or cold and calculating, was evident in media reporting and public commentary throughout the 2016 presidential campaign, and throughout Clinton's career in public life. It was personified, for instance, when Donald Trump decried her for not 'having the look' or 'having the stamina' to be president. Feminists argued that this was a coded way of suggesting that because she was a woman, she was too weak to fulfil the role. Second, the gendered double-standard suggests that Clinton was not held to the same standards for measuring leadership quality as Trump. Clinton had significant experience in political office as a former senator and secretary of state, as well as a high profile of public service while First Lady, married to President Bill Clinton. Alternatively, her opponent had no record of public service and had never held public office (see *The Atlantic* [2016](#)), yet his masculinity implied that he was a 'natural' leader. Moreover, Trump continued his candidacy even after recordings of him made in 2005 emerged detailing his sexual assault of women, followed by a raft of sexual assault claims (see Tolentino [2016](#)). Clinton's supporters frequently pointed out that, as a woman, she would not have been given the same credibility as a candidate – or indeed won the candidacy – if she had the same level of experience as Trump. They further note that Trump's continued

candidacy – despite the assault allegations – demonstrates a devaluing of women and women’s rights in politics (see Tolentino [2016](#)).



**Figure 5.1** Hillary Clinton

Feminist scholars use examples like this to demonstrate that politics still operates on powerfully gendered ideas and social expectations of behaviour. Yet for feminists it is not simply the case that there is a difference between the social constructions of masculinity and femininity. They argue that there is an unequal relationship between masculinity (and its associated characteristics of being strong, decisive, aggressive and dominating the public realm) and feminine characteristics (which are seen as weak, irrational, conciliatory and restricted to the private realm). This unequal relationship sees femininity as politically, economically and socially devalued in the public realm while masculinity is valorised. Feminists argue that we can see this when we use a gender lens to analyse global political events, such as the failed 2016 #She4SG campaign to elect the first female Secretary-General of the United Nations, but also in attitudes to a range of issues including approaches to war, peace, security and the global political economy.

## **Progress towards gender equality in the academy and the policy world**

**J. Ann Tickner**

As we approach the end of the second decade of the new millennium, indicators of vast gender inequality in global economic, social and political life remain. Women are still the majority of the world's poor and underpaid relative to men; the majority of civilian victims in war are women and in 2016 only 22 per cent of parliamentarians were women. Since it entered the discipline, just over twenty-five years ago, feminist IR theory has been concerned with bringing these inequities to light, helping us to understand what causes them, and thinking about ways to end them. Many of the IR scholars, myself included, who write about gender and women in global politics were first motivated to do so when we began to notice how few IR books were written by women scholars. We also began to see that the subject matter of the discipline rarely included anything about women's lives.

For those of us who began this work in the late 1980s, it was remarkable that similar ideas seemed to be emerging in different geographical locations at the same time. Feminist scholars in Europe, the Asia-Pacific and North America began to express similar ideas about how the IR discipline was gendered – and gendered masculine – and how few women were visible in international policy-making. In most societies, this did not appear to be due to legal barriers alone, so we had to look elsewhere for explanations. Consequently, IR feminists began to examine the language of international politics, noting that concepts such as autonomy, power, independence and rationality – characteristics so often described as masculine by both men and women alike – were

preferred ways for states to behave too. It appeared that the language of international politics and its subject matter – national security and war being the most important issues – were subjects about which women were presumed to have little of importance to say.

It has been gratifying to those of us who embarked on this journey twenty-five years ago to watch how feminist IR has grown and flourished. Courses about gender and international relations are taught regularly at universities around the world. Books and scholarly articles have multiplied; new ways of thinking about international relations have been introduced and feminists have helped to broaden the subject matter that is now included in the discipline. Feminists are thinking about security in new ways – about what goes on in war, as well as how wars begin and end. Feminists have drawn attention to the increasing number of civilian casualties in recent wars – many of them women and children. Rape in war is now recognised as part of military strategy rather than an unavoidable consequence of conflict. Feminists have introduced the issues of trafficking and forced prostitution onto the security agenda. They have pointed out that the majority of the world's refugees are women and children, and they have written about women who are crossing state boundaries to seek work as domestic servants and nannies in order to provide income for their families back home. All of these issues have important consequences for how we analyse security and the global economy, and it has been exciting for me to see how these issues are now considered part of the subject matter of our discipline.

We usually find that what is included in the discipline reflects broader concerns of the policy world, and it is indeed the case that the issue of women and gender has received much greater attention from the policy community over the past forty years. Gender issues in development were

first introduced onto the international policy agenda in the 1970s. Before that time, aid agencies and development experts had not considered whether programs aimed at improving people's material lives might have differential effects on women and men. That such considerations are now routinely included on the policy agendas of intergovernmental organisations is due largely to the efforts of women themselves, organising at the national and international levels.

Under pressure from women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and aiming to focus attention on the status of women, both within the United Nations and in its member states, the UN General Assembly declared 1975 International Women's Year. 1975 marked the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women; three UN Conferences on Women were held during the Decade (in 1975, 1980 and 1985). A fourth – the largest – was held ten years later, in Beijing (1995). Parallel NGO conferences were held at each of the official conferences. Attendance at these conferences increased from 5000 in Mexico City in 1975 to an estimated 25 000 in Beijing.

Pressure from women's groups was important in getting the United Nations to disaggregate its data, such as its quality of life indicators, by sex. Adoption of the Gender Development Index (GDI) by the UN Human Development Program in 1995 was an important step in helping to formulate policies to improve women's well-being. The GDI has helped policy-makers to see that countries that score low on gender equality tend to be the same countries that score low on development more generally. This shows that ignoring gender comes at great cost, not only to women but also to men and to development more generally. In response to this concern, in 1997 the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) articulated its Agreed Conclusion on Gender Mainstreaming,

a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all UN policies and programs. Now all UN agencies are required, in theory at least, to operate under its mandate. Again due to pressure by women's groups, in 2000 the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed a milestone resolution. UNSC 1325 was the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council to specifically address the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. UNSC 1325 was the first in a series of Security Council resolutions recognising women's vulnerabilities and also women's right to participate in peacebuilding processes. Within the next fifteen years, the Security Council built on UNSC 1325 with six additional resolutions, which together have formed the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Countries were urged to create National Action Plans to demonstrate how they would implement this agenda. However, there is still a long way to go before the practices of international policy-making live up to the lofty goals that these resolutions have articulated. Since academic feminism was born out of a political movement, those of us who work in the academy believe that we cannot and should not separate our intellectual work from politics and activism. Knowledge is an important first step towards building a more equitable, just and peaceful world. I hope learning about how our discipline has expanded over the past twenty-five years to include the lives of those who had not previously been part of what we call IR will inspire you to think about further steps we can all take towards building a discipline and a world that includes us all.

## **From women to gender**

Of course, feminist international relations can never be *only* about women. While the focus may be on the discrimination and disadvantage that women face in international politics, it can only be understood within the context of the relationship between gendered individuals and the institutions they inhabit. For instance, feminists are interested in how certain institutions are masculinised (e.g. the military), while some are feminised (e.g. child caring and early childhood education). This means that these institutions respond to gendered values and gendered identities. For example, it is no coincidence that Australia's first female ministers were in the housing (1966), education (1975) and social security (1976) portfolios, while it took a further four decades for the first female Minister for Defence to be appointed in 2015. In particular, militaries have been sites where gendered values have persisted and gender roles are fiercely patrolled. For example, until 2011 the 'don't ask, don't tell' policy prohibited gay men and lesbians from serving openly in the US military, and the British military maintained its combat ban for women until 2016. Feminists argue that the reason why these bans lasted so long was because the military – as an institution – valued the qualities of heterosexual and hegemonic masculinity above all others. However, it is important to recognise that these cultures do change and feminists are interested in mapping these changes and directing them towards outcomes of equality.

It is a common misconception, therefore, that feminism is only interested in women. It is important to remember that men are also affected by gender politics. While feminists often describe the international relations field as male dominated, it is worth noting that it is in fact often dominated by certain groups of elite men. Furthermore, it is important to identify areas and issues where certain groups of men may be discriminated against or disadvantaged by

international politics. For instance, R. Charli Carpenter ([2006](#)) has demonstrated that in conflict, able-bodied men of combat age are frequently the targets of wartime violence as both combatants and civilians. This is because men are often assumed to be natural combatants, and therefore are seen to pose an immediate threat – even if they are civilians. A tragic example of this is the genocide committed against more than 8000 men and boys in the town of Srebrenica in July 1995, during the Bosnian conflict. They were targeted in part because their gender was seen to be naturally combative. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, while there has been growing action to address gender-and sexual-based violence against civilian women in armed conflict through measures such as Security Council Resolutions, the International Criminal Court and international war crimes tribunals, significantly less attention has been given to such violence against men. In this sense, most feminists seek to highlight how constructions of gender in international relations impact men and women differently.

However, while feminists generally agree on the importance of understanding and addressing gender-based discrimination and disadvantage, they can and do disagree in a number of important areas. It is from these sites of contention that different feminist international relations theories and practices arise.

## **Feminist theories of international relations**

Like all political theories, feminist international relations has many strands, some of which contradict each other. While two people may each call themselves a feminist, they can still find themselves disagreeing on basic ideas about women, men, gender and the [international system](#). Feminisms such as

liberal, radical, Marxist, cultural, post-colonial, constructivist, eco, critical and postmodern all reflect the different ways in which feminists interpret the information before them (see [Box 5.3](#)). In this context, the various feminisms look in different ways at the nature of international relations and how we should study it; the nature(s) and identities of gendered individuals; the gendered power relationships that exist between people, ideas, institutions and structures; questions regarding what constitutes gender equality; and strategies of how to attain it.

### **Box 5.3: Terminology**

#### **Feminist theories of International Relations**

Below are some of the theories developed by feminist scholars:

- *Liberal feminism* is based on liberal ideas of equality between men and women.
- *Marxist feminism* argues that the liberation of women can be achieved through the dismantling of [capitalism](#) and oppressive class relations.
- *Black feminism* examines the relationship between gender-and race-based discrimination.
- *Cultural and maternal feminism* argues that women's peaceful natures can contribute to a politics of global peace.
- *Post-colonial feminism* examines the intersection of different forms of oppression facing women in colonial and post-colonial societies that are often neglected by Western-based feminisms.

- *Critical feminisms* asks fundamental questions about women's and men's identities and the gendered nature of the international system, and explores the possibilities of [emancipation](#) for women.
- *Ecofeminism* is an ecological approach to feminism that suggests the values of patriarchy and capitalism have created an artificial division between humans and nature which can be remedied through the feminine instinct for nature.

### **Liberal feminism**

Liberal feminism is centrally concerned with equal rights between men and women. As its name suggests, it is broadly derived from the political theory of [liberalism](#) (see [Chapter 2](#)). Liberal feminists, like other liberals, support the rights of individuals to seek fulfilment, to pursue their own interests and to be equal before the law. Liberal feminism has a long political tradition. British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft's ([1992 \[1792\]](#)) *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 was perhaps the first attempt to make the liberal case for women's rights. She argued that discriminatory practices, such as denying women education and full citizenship, did not give women the opportunity to fulfil their potential as human beings. Today, liberal feminists continue to argue that sex-based discrimination deprives women of equal rights and the right to pursue their political, economic and social self-interest. They argue that this can be eliminated by the removal of legal and other obstacles that have denied them the same rights and opportunities as men. Consequently, most liberal feminists agree that the state is the proper authority for lobbying for, and enforcing,

women's rights. It is believed that even though the state may itself engage in discriminatory practices, it is nonetheless capable of becoming the neutral and objective arbiter of gender equality.

In Western nations, liberal feminism remains powerful in policy-making circles and political lobbying. Throughout the centuries, many prominent women's organisations have argued their cases from a liberal feminist perspective. These campaigns are often rights based, making reference to equal rights and the rule of law. These have included the suffragette movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which championed the 'right to vote' campaigns for women; the ongoing 'equal pay for equal work' campaigns; the 'right to choose/pro-choice' campaigns around issues of women and sexual health; and the 'right to fight' campaign for women in the military.

Consequently, liberal feminists are concerned primarily with women's exclusion from, and inequality in, areas of public life. They are *not*, however, concerned with the nature of that public life (be it in the military, the state, the workplace or the economy). It is on this basis that a number of feminists have criticised liberal feminism.

### **Critiques of liberal feminism**

Critiques of liberal feminism parallel many of the critiques of liberalism generally. First, liberal feminism's claim to universality is problematised. Just as liberalism speaks of the rights of 'man', so liberal feminism speaks of the rights of 'woman'. It is accused particularly of representing the interests of white women in Western societies as if they were the interests of all women. In this sense, it is often charged with claiming objective knowledge for all women and being ignorant of subjective concerns and issues based on other identities, such as race, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic background.

It is from this particular criticism that we see the rise of specific issue/identity-based feminisms such as black and post-colonial feminisms. This array of feminisms points out that liberal feminism's agenda may not always be relevant to women of colour and that, in some cases, liberal feminist discourse excludes them and their needs. For instance, bell hooks' text *Ain't I a Woman?* criticised American liberal feminists for excluding the needs and interests of African-American women (hooks [1981](#)). Five years later, Chandra Mohanty's ([1984](#)) famous essay 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' criticised Western feminists for treating women from the developing world as a homogeneous and victimised group rather than understanding the differences between these women and the challenges they faced. In this sense, post-colonial feminism has identified the ways in which gender interacts with other forms of oppression, including race, class, caste, physical ability and religion. Importantly, this 'intersectionality' helps to identify the different ways in which different women experience oppression.

This leads to the second major criticism of liberal feminism: its claim to know 'the real world' objectively. Liberal feminism by and large accepts current mainstream articulations of the world 'as the way it is'. It accepts the idea that the world is necessarily a conflictual place made of states vying for power in an international anarchical realm. It doesn't seek to *change* the nature of the world; only to change women's roles and opportunities in it. In this sense, a woman like former US National Security Advisor (2001–05) and Secretary of State (2005–09) Condoleezza Rice is an important role model. She is proof that a woman is as capable as a man of running the State Department and coordinating the post 9/11 US-led conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. This approach does not, however, question the utility or efficacy of war as a key feature in international relations.

## **Critical and postmodern feminisms**

Like post-colonial feminists, critical and postmodern feminists are distinct from liberal feminists in a number of ways (see [Chapters 4](#) and [6](#)). The first distinction is that the former problematise and investigate the category of 'woman'. They reject the idea that 'woman' is a universal category and that women have a specific, shared way of knowing and being. Instead, they not only acknowledge the differences between women; they also embrace them. Critical and postmodern feminists argue that, like all identities, being 'a woman' is a subjective experience. They suggest that different women may suffer different forms of oppression and have different needs or ways of addressing these issues. Therefore, individual feminists should not assume that their own needs are the same as those of every other woman, and should accept the possibility that different feminists may think differently about important issues. Feminists, for example, may disagree about whether Islamic headscarves for women are a source of oppression or a source of personal empowerment. Critical and postmodern feminists argue that knowledge about this is subjective, so it is up to individual women to make the decision for themselves, rather than rely upon a universal decision imposed on all women.

The second key feature of critical and postmodern feminisms is their claim that gendered constructions pervade not just individuals, but also institutions, knowledge and political discourse. Consequently, these feminisms attempt to challenge women's disadvantage and discrimination through an investigation and critique of the gendered nature of broader political structures and institutions. Critical and postmodern feminists do not accept any institution or claim to knowledge in international relations as neutral, or free of gendered construction. They argue that institutions like the state, the economy, the military and the academic discipline of IR are all gendered in specific ways that display a power relationship between masculine and feminine values.

Consequently, critical and postmodern feminists argue that knowledge about what should constitute the study of international relations is often gendered to promote masculine characteristics. Particularly, they argue that realist international relations is not objective, but rather privileges masculine values (Tickner [1992](#)). Because it values states, anarchy, power, aggression and rationality, and devalues notions of cooperation, conciliation, self-sacrifice, peace, physical weakness and emotion, it is considered a masculine practice that often privileges elite men. Critical and postmodern feminists argue that these values and structures create inherent biases against non-conforming identities. Moreover, they can be difficult – although not impossible – to dismantle.

Thus critical and postmodern feminists argue that because they can demonstrate the ways in which gendered relations are constructed in international life, international life is not immutable. This means that international relations, and the ways in which we think about and study it, can change. International relations can be thought about and practised differently. Critical feminists in particular are interested in how this might happen in ways that are emancipatory for women and men. For critical and postmodern feminists, then, international politics does not need to be predicated on war, power, violence or oppression, but can (and perhaps should) be understood and valued in terms of its potential for peace, emancipation, cooperation and equality. Tickner ([2001](#): 47) argues that a critical feminism should work towards an emancipatory politics of international life that is inclusive of all identities and committed to ‘improving the lives of the whole of humankind’.

## **Conclusion: What does feminism add to our study of international relations?**

For many feminists, the role of gender in international relations is not a sub-set of the discipline, but something that is intrinsic to every aspect of it. Feminist theories of international relations suggest that there are other legitimate ways of seeing, knowing and being in the world. This gender-sensitive lens offers international relations scholars a broader series of issues which should be studied as part of the discipline, and a guide to how to address areas of gender-based discrimination. Its bottom-up approach brings the lives of ordinary people into focus, and works towards understanding international relations not as an abstract practice, but as something that affects, and is affected by, the lives of people.

## **Discussion questions**

- 5.1 Why should international relations consider gender issues?
- 5.2 Why do all countries have more men than women in political leadership roles?
- 5.3 Why was international relations resistant to feminist theories for so long?
- 5.4 Feminists often investigate the ways in which women's experiences in the international labour market, development projects, diplomacy and post-conflict societies are different from those of men. What might be some of these differences?
- 5.5 Why do women and men have such disproportionate experiences in the labour market?

## *Further reading*

Ackerly, Brooke and True, Jacqui 2010, *Doing feminist research in political and*

*social sciences*, London: Palgrave. *A good guide to research in this area.*

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Enloe, Cynthia 1990, *Bananas, beaches and bases: Making feminist sense of international politics*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. *A modern classic that answers the question, 'Where are the women in international relations?'*

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Shepherd, Laura (ed.) 2015, *Gender matters in global politics: A feminist introduction to international relations*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge. *A broad-ranging collection of feminist insights into a number of IR's key issues by some of the world's leading feminist IR scholars.*

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Steans, Jill 2013, *Gender and international relations: Theory, practice, policy*, 3rd ed., Cambridge: Polity Press. *A comprehensive introductory study of the various dimensions of gender in international relations.*

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Tickner, J. Ann 2001, *Gendering world politics: Issues and approaches in the post-Cold War era*, New York: Columbia University Press. *A magisterial analyses of IR by one of the discipline's most influential scholars.*

## 6

# Postmodernism



**Roland Bleiker**

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[Postmodernity as a new historical period](#)

[Postmodernism as a critical way of understanding modernity](#)

[The emergence of the third debate in IR scholarship](#)

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[Further reading](#)

## Introduction

This chapter offers an account of postmodernism. It begins by drawing a distinction between two broad approaches to the postmodern: one that outlines the contours of a new historical period (postmodernity) and another that places emphasis on finding new ways of understanding modern practices of knowledge and politics (postmodernism). The second part of the chapter examines how

postmodern ideas entered IR scholarship, and how ensuing contributions continue to reveal important insights up to today.

Defining [postmodernism](#) is no easy task. Postmodern scholarship is characterised more by diversity than by a common set of beliefs. Add to this the fact that ‘postmodern’ has become a very contentious label, which is used less by its advocates and more by polemical critics who fear that embracing postmodern values would throw us into a dangerous nihilist void. But while the contours of the postmodern will always remain elusive and contested, the substantial issues that the respective debates have brought to the fore are important enough to warrant attention.

## **Postmodernity as a new historical period**

The postmodern has become a stretched, widely used and highly controversial term. It first achieved prominence in literary criticism and architecture, but eventually spread into virtually all realms, including international relations. What the postmodern actually means is highly disputed. The increasing sense of confusion in the proliferation of the postmodern led Gianni Vattimo ([1992](#): 1) to note that this term is so omnipresent and faddish that it has become almost obligatory to distance oneself from it. But Vattimo, and many others, nevertheless held on. He, alongside such diverse authors as Jean-François Lyotard ([1979](#)), Jean Baudrillard ([1983](#)), David Harvey ([1989](#)) and Fredric Jameson ([1984](#)), viewed the postmodern as both a changing attitude and a fundamentally novel historical condition. They focused on the cultural transformations that have taken place in the Western world and assumed, as Andreas Huyssen ([1984](#): 8) summarises, that we are witnessing ‘a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices and discourse formations which distinguishes a

postmodern set of assumptions, experiences and propositions from that of a preceding period'. Such shifts are recognised in various globalising tendencies, such as the rapid evolution and global reach of mass media and other information and communication tools.

There are two broad ways of conceptualising inquiries into the postmodern. The first revolves around attempts to demonstrate that we have entered a fundamentally new historical epoch. Some scholars believe that the all-encompassing historical period called modernity has given way to something else: a postmodernity (Vattimo [1988](#)). To understand postmodern approaches, one must thus first investigate the modern elements from which they try to distinguish themselves.

Modernity is generally understood to be the historical period that followed the Middle Ages. It emerged with the onset of the Renaissance in fifteenth-century Italy and spanned the centuries that followed. The past 500 years have brought about changes that are more radical and far-reaching than virtually anything that had happened in previous human history. Countless dynamics started to unfold during the modern period. They are linked to such features as industrialisation, advances in science and technology, and the spread of [weapons of mass destruction](#). The [nation](#)-state, with all its disciplinary practices, emerged as the dominant political actor.

Postmodern approaches assume that changes over the past few decades have been significant enough to suggest that we have entered a period that is fundamentally different from the preceding modern one. The key features of this new postmodernity are associated with processes of [globalisation](#), such as the rapid evolution and spread of mass media, computers and other communicative features. These processes, it is said, have led to a 'transparent society' (Vattimo [1992](#)); to an 'ecstasy of communication' (Baudrillard [1985](#)); to a post-industrial phase, of which the main feature is knowledge production (Lyotard [1984](#)); and

to the advance of new technologies and a consumer [democracy](#) that provides [capitalism](#) with an inherently new cultural logic (Jameson [1984](#)). Paul Virilio believes that these developments have fundamentally altered the relationship between time and space. The centrality of the latter, he stresses, has decreased and time has taken over as the criterion around which many global dynamics revolve. The instantaneous character of communication and mass media has reduced the importance of duration and locality. The ‘now’ of the emission is privileged to the detriment of the ‘here’: the space where things take place (Virilio [1986](#); see also Harvey [1989](#)).

Some commentators portray this new postmodern period in rather gloomy terms, stressing that our ability to influence political affairs is becoming increasingly elusive. We hear of a nation-state that is no longer able to uphold its [sovereignty](#) and the spheres of justice and civility that the corresponding boundaries were supposed to protect. Disempowerment and disentitlement have become key features of globalisation. We hear of a [neoliberal](#) world [order](#) that is increasingly being run by a few powerful multilateral institutions and [multinational corporations](#). Jean Baudrillard ([1983](#)) even believes that we have lost the ability to distinguish between reality and virtuality. Our media culture, he says, has conditioned our minds in such a way that we have lost the ability to penetrate beneath the manifest levels of the surface. Others view the postmodern period more optimistically. They point out that increased trade opportunities have brought prosperity to many parts of the world, or they stress that new communicative tools open up a range of positive opportunities – from better cross-cultural communication to the possibilities of articulating cosmopolitan notions of democracy (see Connolly [2002](#): 178).

## **Postmodernism as a critical way of**

## understanding modernity

A second postmodern approach does not seek to identify the contours of a new historical epoch; instead, it searches for means by which we can understand and live in modernity in more reflective and inclusive ways. David Campbell ([1998](#): 212–13) and Jean-François Lyotard ([1991](#): 24–35) are examples of presumably postmodern authors who remind us that, as modernity is already such an elusive phenomenon, the concept of postmodernity becomes nothing but a parody of the phantom from which it seeks to distance itself. Instead of looking at modernity as a historical period or a set of institutions, these authors follow Michel Foucault's ([1984](#): 39) advice and treat it primarily as an attitude, 'a way of thinking and feeling', 'a mode of relating to contemporary reality'.

Here too the key task is to distinguish a modern set of assumptions about the world from a superseding, postmodern way of conceptualising socio-political issues. One could say that the modern political consciousness emerges from the tension between Romanticism and the [Enlightenment](#). What has been retained from the romantic ideal is the autonomy of the self, the quest for independence and [self-determination](#), the belief that people can shape history. This form of modern [idealism](#) was then supplemented with the scientific heritage of the Enlightenment, with the desire to systematise: to search for rational foundations and certainty in a world of turmoil and constant flux.

The romantic element of our contemporary consciousness is epitomised in Hegel. What makes modernity different, in Hegel's view, is its attempt at self-understanding, the desire to establish [norms](#) and values on their own terms, rather than by way of borrowing from or rejecting the ideas of a surpassed epoch. The keystone of this process of self-grounding is the principle of subjectivity, which – at least in Habermas's reading of Hegel – is linked to a perception of freedom that recognises an individual's autonomy and

responsibility in the realms of action and reflection (Habermas [1987](#): 16–44). The legacy of the Enlightenment, then, provides this subjectivity-oriented approach with stable and scientific foundations. Charles Baudelaire ([1961](#): 1163), in a much-cited passage, draws attention to the recurring quest for certainty in a world of turbulence and chaos. While describing modernity as ‘the transient, the fleeting, the contingent’, Baudelaire points towards the constant attempts to discover underlying patterns behind these ephemeral features. He describes the recurring quest for essences as a desire to ‘extract the eternal out of the transient’.

Within such modern attempts to fuse subjectivity and science, there is ample room for discussion and diversity – more than in any preceding period. Indeed, Hegel considers the right to criticism precisely as one of modernity’s key characteristics (Habermas [1987](#): 17). The breathing space necessary for criticism was provided by the emergence of a public sphere in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Europe. Passionate debates were waged about all aspects of modern life. Virtually every opinion, every thought, every [theory](#) was attacked, refuted or at least submitted to intense and sustained scrutiny.

While the waging of fierce intellectual debates emerged as a key feature of modernity, the range of these debates was not as boundless as it first seems. William Connolly ([1993](#)) emphasises that modern debates all have a distinctive character: they are all well framed. The contours of the modern framing process have to a large extent been drawn by the recurring unwillingness to deal with what Nietzsche ([1974](#); see [Box 6.1](#)) called the death of God: the disappearance, at the end of the Medieval period, of a generally accepted worldview that provided a stable ground from which it was possible to assess nature, knowledge, common values, truth, politics – in short, life itself. When the old theocentric world crumbled, when the one and only commonly accepted point of reference vanished, the death of God became the key dilemma around which

modern debates were waged. Yet, instead of accepting the absence of stable foundations and dealing with the ensuing responsibilities, many prominent modern approaches embarked on attempts to find replacements for the fallen God. They desperately searched for stable foundations that could offer the type of order and certainty that had once been provided by the Catholic Church. This is how Nietzsche famously put it:

God is dead; but given the way people are there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.

(Nietzsche [1974](#): 167. Translation modified).

The quest to replace God and search for new ultimate foundations has taken different shapes in various stages of the modern project. For Renaissance humanists, it centred on a sceptical and rhetorical belief in human agency and the virtue of ‘men’. During the Enlightenment, it was trust in science and universal reason. For Romantics, it was the belief in aesthetics and a deified self. For [Marxists](#), it consisted of faith in history’s teleological dimension.

### **Box 6.1:** Key figures

#### **Friedrich Nietzsche: The ‘postmodern’ philosopher**

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is often said to have influenced postmodern thought. He held many views on numerous topics, but his most influential legacy might well relate to the manner in which he approached fundamental questions of knowledge. Nietzsche questioned the deeply entrenched modern search for universal forms of truth, whether based in Christian morals or on scientific foundations. He believed that the search for truth always contained a will to power. This is why critics accused him of nihilism – that is, of

advocating a world in which we no longer have moral values.

Postmodern proponents of Nietzsche strongly disagree with such a view. They believe Nietzsche can provide us with crucial insights into political dynamics: he makes us realise why we need to pay attention to processes of inclusion and exclusion, and to how knowledge and power are always intertwined.

The well-bounded nature of modern debates is perfectly epitomised in IR scholarship. Here, too, everything has been debated fiercely. Seemingly nothing was spared criticism. Yet these debates have all been well framed by the urge to impose order upon a complex and elusive modern world. Steve Smith ([1996; 2004](#)) has drawn attention to this framing process. For him, [positivism](#) is the common theme that runs through a diverse set of mainstream approaches to international relations. At its most elementary level, positivism is based on an attempt to separate subject and object. It implies that the social scientist, as detached observer (subject), can produce value-free knowledge of an independent reality (object), and that our comprehension of facts can be separated from our relationship with them (Smith [1996](#): 11–44; see also Smith [2004](#): 499–515; see [Chapter 1](#)).

For a postmodern scholar, the key task is thus to accept the death of God: to recognise that there are no underlying foundations that can absolve us of taking responsibility for political decisions. Thinking and acting inevitably express a ‘will to truth’, a desire to control and impose order upon random and idiosyncratic events. ‘To think’, Adorno ([1992](#): 17) says, ‘is to identify’. When we think, we identify choices, privilege one interpretation over others and, often without knowing it, exclude what does not fit into the way we want to see things.

There is no escape from this process, no possibility of extracting pure facts from observation. To disrespect these limits to cognition is to endow one particular and necessarily subjective form of knowledge with the [power](#) to determine the nature of factual evidence. It is from such a theoretical vantage point that scholars like Jim George ([1994](#)) or Richard Ashley ([1984](#)) have tried to show how positivist approaches have transformed one specific interpretation of world political realities – the dominant realist one – into reality. As a result, realist perceptions of the international gradually have become accepted as ‘common sense’, to the point where any critique against them has to be evaluated in terms of an already existing and largely naturalised (realist) worldview. Smith detects powerful mechanisms of control precisely in this ability to determine meaning and rationality, to decide which issues are or are not legitimate concerns for international theorists. ‘Defining common sense,’ he argues, ‘is the ultimate act of political power’ (Smith [1996](#): 13). It separates the possible from the impossible and directs the theory and practice of world politics on a particular path.



**Figure 6.1** Friedrich Nietzsche, 1882

**Box 6.2:** Discussion points

**The politics of representation I: René Magritte's 'This is not a pipe'**

We have seen in this chapter that postmodern authors believe that interpretation and representation are inevitable aspects of politics; that facts are not pre-given, but depend on how we view and present them. Nowhere do we find a more compelling illustration of this position than in a famous painting by the surrealist René Magritte (1898–1967). The painting features a carefully drawn pipe placed above an equally carefully handwritten line that reads '*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*' ('This is

not a pipe’). On the one hand, this statement seems silly: of course this is a pipe. But on closer inspection we realise that Magritte is right. This is not a pipe but only a painting of a pipe – a representation. In everyday life we use such representations to make sense of the world around us. In this painting, Magritte playfully highlights the complex relationship between representations and objects, words and things. He wants to highlight that there is always a gap between a representation and the object it represents. Every form of representation has such an aesthetic gap – not just paintings, but social scientific representations of politics as well (see Bleiker [2001](#)).

If you would like to know more, Michel Foucault wrote a short book on the subject called *This is Not a Pipe* ([1983 \[1973\]](#)).

## **The emergence of the third debate in IR scholarship**

Postmodern approaches entered IR scholarship during the mid-to late 1980s in the context of what is usually called the ‘third debate’ (see [Chapter 1](#)). The first great debate is said to have taken place during the inter-war period, when [liberalism](#) and [realism](#) (see [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#)) disagreed fundamentally about how to oppose the spectre of Nazi Germany. The second great debate was followed by post-war [methodological](#) disputes between behaviouralism and traditionalism. Various versions of these debates have emerged since, and so have disputes about the adequacy of representing IR scholarship as a series of great debates (see [Introduction](#)).

The third debate was waged around so-called [epistemological](#) questions – that is, questions about how we can know the realities of world politics. An increasing number of scholars identified themselves as ‘dissidents’. They expressed a growing dissatisfaction with prevailing realist, positivist, [state-centric](#) and masculine approaches to the study of international relations (Ashley and Walker [1990](#): 263). Common to these dissident approaches was a strong opposition to what Lyotard ([1979](#): 7–9) famously described as a modern tendency to ground and legitimise knowledge in reference to a grand narrative – that is, a universalising framework that seeks to [emancipate](#) the individual by mastering the conditions of life. Postmodern approaches, by contrast, try to understand processes of exclusion and inclusion that inevitably are entailed in the articulation of knowledge and political positions. They seek to challenge and uproot entrenched thinking patterns, such that we can see the world from more than one perspective and marginalised voices can be brought into the realm of dialogue.

Important early contributions to postmodern international relations scholarship can be found in the work of such authors as Richard Ashley, David Campbell, William Connolly, Costas Constantinou, Simon Dalby, James Der Derian, Jenny Edkins, Jim George, Michael Shapiro, R.B.J. Walker and Cynthia Weber (see Ashley and Walker [1990](#); Constantinou [1996](#); Campbell [1992](#) and [1998](#); Der Derian and Shapiro [1989](#); Edkins [1999](#); George [1994](#); Walker [1993](#); Weber [1995](#)).

### **Box 6.3:** Discussion points

#### **The politics of representation II: Remembering and forgetting**

Here is a little political experiment you can do yourself to see why questions of representation are both inevitable and political:

Next time you sit in a restaurant, try to remember one minute of what you read, see, sense, smell, feel and rationalise during this short time span: everything, from all the items on the menu and their prices to the size, shape and colour of the objects you see, or the way they project shadows onto other objects. Remember all the details about all the people, how they look, the way they move, what they say, in all their different accents and languages. Remember all the smells and sounds, all your emotional and rational reactions to these impressions, and how you compared them, directly or subconsciously, to impressions from previous experiences.

Now ask yourself two questions: First, can you remember all the ‘facts’ during this one minute of your life. Can you? Of course not. It is impossible to remember all of this. The only way to remember anything about these sixty seconds is to forget at least 99.99 per cent of what you have experienced. Second, if you had to write up a one-page summary of what happened during this minute, and everyone else in the restaurant had to do so as well, then what do you think the likelihood is that everyone remembers exactly the same facts? Very unlikely. Most people would focus on different things they saw, sensed and remembered.

If we cannot retrace a single minute of our mundane life, where nothing controversial happens, then how could we possibly remember something as monumental as, say, World War I, the Cuban missile crisis, the collapse of the Berlin Wall or the terrorist attacks of 9/11? These political events are not just extremely complex, with millions and millions of ‘facts’, but the interpretation of these facts is very often hotly contested. Here too, the only way to remember anything at all about a political event is to forget virtually everything about it, except for the

few facts, impressions and interpretations that have been deemed memorable.

That is precisely what IR scholarship is doing: selecting what is to be remembered and separating it from the overwhelming rest. This is a process of representation that is selective, subjective and highly political. Recognising this does not mean that there are no hard facts out there; however, when we try to make sense of them, we inevitably select and prioritise. We forget far more than we remember.

Next time you read an account of a political event, ask yourself: What kind of politics of representation is involved here? Which facts are remembered and which are forgotten? Why is this the case? What are the political consequences?

There are, meanwhile, several concise and highly convincing summaries of postmodern approaches to international relations. Three stand out. The first such study is by Richard Devetak ([2013b](#)). He identifies four common features: (1) a key concern with the relationship between power and knowledge; (2) the employment of post-positivist methodologies, such as [deconstruction](#) and [genealogy](#); (3) a critical engagement with the role of the [state](#) and related questions of boundaries, violence and identity; and (4) the resulting need to fundamentally rethink the relationship between politics and ethics. The second summary of postmodern approaches to international relations is authored by Anthony Burke ([2008](#): 359–77). He also does an excellent job of crystallising the key issues at stake, focusing on the need to expose how prevailing approaches have imposed one particular version of ‘reality’ upon a far more diverse, complex world. Burke reveals how postmodern attempts to break free of such constraints are not only sophisticated and complex, but also of direct

practical relevance. A third study is a chapter by David Campbell and Roland Bleiker (2016: 196–218). They prefer the term ‘poststructuralism’ over ‘postmodernism’. They speak not of a paradigm or a theory, but of a critical attitude to understanding how certain forms of politics become possible and are seen as legitimate and rational. While conventional scholarly inquiries often take such factors as pre-given, poststructural approaches consider processes of interpretation and representation as both inevitable and inherently political in nature.

These summaries also make clear that postmodern approaches are highly diverse. They therefore employ a range of different methods to study political phenomena. Among the most prominent ones, as Devetak has pointed out, are genealogy and deconstruction. The former is associated with Nietzsche and the French philosopher Michel Foucault. The latter is linked to Jacques Derrida and poststructuralism. Both genealogy and deconstruction recognise that we cannot represent the world as it is. Our understanding of political and social phenomena is intrinsically linked to the cultural environment in which we are embedded, the values we hold and the language we use to express them. The term ‘discourse’ is often used to express how this intertwining of political practices, cultural values and linguistic representations makes up the world as we know it.

The key objective for postmodern scholars is not to arrive at some objective truth about political events or phenomena. Such an endeavour would be as problematic as it is futile. The point, rather, is to increase understanding of how power and knowledge are intertwined in all representations of politics. Genealogy is an alternative form of history: an effort to illuminate how particular historical evolutions created the type of world we live in today. Deconstruction, by contrast, is a scholarly method designed to expose values and power relations that are entailed – either explicitly or implicitly – in particular texts, ranging anywhere from political speeches to legal documents and popular

magazines. Both methods are an integral part of postmodern inquiries into the modern practices that make up our contemporary world.

## **Polemical critiques and the legacy of postmodernism**

Postmodern contributions to international relations soon became highly controversial. They triggered a number of heated debates and often very polemical attacks. Defenders of the postmodern presented it as a necessary critique of modern thought-forms and their problematic impact on political practices. Opponents justified the modern project at all costs, for they feared that postmodern alternatives would induce an endless fall into a relativist abyss. Many established scholars believed that a postmodern celebration of difference would undermine the search for coherent visions of world politics. Such visions, the argument went, were badly needed at a time when violent conflicts and economic insecurities haunted the international system. Some went so far as to fear that heeding postmodern approaches would open up the floodgates to relativistic ravings, according to which ‘anything goes’ and ‘any narrative is as valid as another’ (Østerud [1996](#): 386). Illustrative of this polemical critique is a volume edited by Darryl Jarvis ([2000](#): xi), who believes that postmodern approaches are ‘taking the discipline down an ideologically destructive road’. He writes of postmodernism’s ‘radical rejectionism’ and of ‘a compendium of the visual arts, science fiction, identities, personal stories, and research whims whose intellectual agendas are so disparate as to be meaningless’. Without clear disciplinary boundaries, Jarvis believes, we ‘lose sight of the subject we once used to study’, and thus end up in a ‘vacuous activity, facile and devoid of meaning’ ([2000](#): xi, 5, 7).

The polemical and aggressive nature of these critiques have led many postmodern scholars to abandon the term. Instead, they prefer to use concepts like poststructuralism or post-positivism to designate their work, or they prefer to use no label at all. Indeed, a postmodernist would say that labelling and surveying is a typically modern attempt to bring order and certainty into a world of chaos and flux. It is a desire to squeeze freely floating and thus somewhat worrisome ideas into surveyable categories, to cut off and smooth the various overlapping edges so that each piece neatly fits into its assigned place. This is why the positive potential of postmodern approaches can be appreciated and realised in practice only once we move beyond the current polemic that surrounds the term 'postmodernism'.

It would be impossible to list all the contributions that have been made in the wake of the emergence of postmodern approaches in international relations. While the term 'postmodernism' is often no longer used, the type of ethos it has advanced has been embraced by countless scholars. I can only draw attention to a few recent examples of research that draws on the type of theoretical positions introduced in this chapter. They include work on diplomacy (Neumann [2015](#)), conflict and war (Dauphinee [2013](#)), peace-building (Richmond [2011](#)), trauma and emotions (Hutchison [2016](#)), identity politics (Epstein [2011](#); Edkins [2015](#)) or popular culture (Shepherd [2010](#)). Other examples include research on the links between war and tourism (Lisle [2016](#)), the role of non-Western knowledge sources and political practices (Choi [2015](#); Ling [2016](#)) or on how aesthetic sources, such as film and photographs, provide political insights and play political roles (Bleiker [2012](#); Callahan [2015](#)).

## Conclusion

By challenging the modern assumptions of dominant approaches to international relations, postmodernists have tried to open up various possibilities for rethinking not only the relationship between theory and evidence, fact and value, but also the very nature of the dilemmas that have haunted world politics for decades.

Summarising the nature of postmodern approaches is not easy, for if they have a unifying point it is precisely the acceptance of difference, the refusal to uphold one position as the correct and desirable one. 'The postmodern begins', Wolfgang Ivers (1988: 29–30) says, 'where totality ends'. Its vision is the vision of plurality, a positive attempt to secure and explore multiple dimensions of the processes that legitimise and ground social and political practices. Once the end of totalising thought is accepted, of course, it becomes very difficult to talk about the postmodern without descending into clichés or doing grave injustice to individual authors who explore various terrains of difference. Jane Flax (1990: 188) recognised this difficulty, and admits that by speaking about postmodernism one already runs 'the risk of violating some of its central values – heterogeneity, multiplicity, and difference'.

This diversity is evident when we look at the postmodern approaches to international relations. Postmodern authors have embarked on a great variety of projects. They have exposed numerous problematic features, including the state-centrism of realist and liberal approaches to international relations, as well as their narrow perceptions of what the international is and where its relations take place. They have challenged the masculine and Eurocentric values of existing approaches and re-examined such notions as [security](#), identity, agency, sovereignty, diplomacy, [geopolitics](#) and ethics. And they have used a multitude of post-positivist methodologies to do so – genealogies and deconstruction, for instance.

Postmodern scholars express a deep scepticism towards totalising and universalising forms of knowledge. Although this form of scepticism is characterised more by the search for tolerance and diversity than by a common political agenda, one can still identify several broad postmodern features that are of direct practical relevance to both the theory and practice of world politics. Of particular political importance are the following three interrelated features.

First, postmodern approaches stress that order, security, [peace](#) and justice cannot be imposed by a preconceived universal model – be it of a [communist](#), [neoliberal](#) or any other nature. There is no inherent model for peace, no grand plan that could free us of violence and deliver perpetual peace. Every political model, no matter how sensitive, is based on a system of exclusion. Such exclusion is as desirable as it is necessary. But in order to stay valid and fair, political foundations need to be submitted to periodic scrutiny. Extending William Connolly's ([1995](#)) approach, the search for peace should thus be linked to a certain attitude, an 'ethos', that is based not on a set of fundamental principles but on the very need to periodically disturb such principles.

Second, the search for peace, security and justice must pay key attention to questions of inclusion and exclusion, which lie at the heart of violence. No order can be just and promote peace unless it is sensitive to the power relations it upholds. Maintaining sensitivity to this process entails, as with the first factor outlined above, an ongoing self-critical engagement with the type of political project that is being advanced in the name of peace. Expressed in other words, the task is to expose the power-knowledge nexus entailed in all political projects, thereby opening up opportunities for marginalised voices to be heard and brought into the realm of dialogue.

Third, peace, security and justice can only be established and maintained through an empathetic engagement with and respect for difference, be it related to sexual, cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, political or any other form of identity.

The challenge, then, consists not of letting difference deteriorate into violence, but rather making it part of a worldview that is tolerant of multiple political and moral sources.

## **Discussion questions**

**6.1** Postmodern approaches to knowledge are said to be different from modern ones. How exactly are they different? What are the key components of each tradition of thought? What are the concrete political consequences of these different ways of knowing world politics?

**6.2** Postmodern approaches are said to display an inherent scepticism towards so-called grand narratives: forms of knowledge that proclaim ‘true’ insight into the world, then universalise the ensuing political positions. What are the reasons for this scepticism? Is it justified?

**6.3** Postmodern approaches are often associated with pessimism and relativism, with positions that can no longer separate right from wrong and good from evil. Do you believe that this accusation is warranted? Defend your conclusion by juxtaposing arguments advanced by proponents and opponents of postmodernism.

### *Further reading*

Burke, Anthony 2008, ‘Postmodernism’, in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds), *The Oxford handbook of international relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An excellent chapter that highlights the practical and ethical contribution of postmodern approaches.*

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Campbell, David and Bleiker, Roland 2016, 'Poststructuralism', in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International relations theories: Discipline and diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A chapter that stresses the need to see poststructuralism and postmodernism not as theories, but as a critical attitude to understanding issues such as power, knowledge and identity in world politics.*

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Der Derian, James and Shapiro, Michael J. (eds) 1989, *International/intertextual relations: Postmodern readings of world politics*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books. *One of the first comprehensive collections to deal with postmodern contributions to international relations scholarship.*

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Devetak, Richard 2013, 'Poststructuralism', in Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Terry Nardin, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit and Jacqui True (eds), *Theories of international relations*, 5th ed., London: Macmillan. *The most concise and compelling analysis of postmodern contributions to international relations.*

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George, Jim 1994, *Discourses of global politics: A critical (re)introduction to international relations*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. *An early contribution to postmodern debates, written by an Australian scholar; still one of the most interesting single-authored treatments of postmodernism.*

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Lyotard, Jean-François 1984, *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. *Perhaps the most influential and authoritative statement on postmodernism.*

# Constructivism



**Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Joshua S. Jones**

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## Introduction

This chapter presents the outlines of a constructivist understanding of world politics. We begin with a discussion of state identity, a fundamental concept of constructivism applied to international affairs, and explore the ways in which identity defines and bounds state actions. To illustrate this concept, we address a number of issues central to the study of world politics: change, governance and security. Overall, our goal is to present a thickly textured, layered understanding

of the international realm based on a notion taken for granted in much of IR theory: *meaning*.

[Constructivism](#) is the newest but perhaps the most dynamic of the main theories of international relations. The important works heralding the constructivist approach to the study of global politics – articles by Alexander Wendt ([1987](#), [1992](#)) and books by Nicholas Onuf ([1989](#)) and Friedrich Kratochwil ([1989](#)) – are only about two and a half decades old, even though the intellectual traditions on which they draw have long histories in other academic fields. Unlike [liberalism](#) and [realism](#) (see [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#)), which have taken their bearings from developments in economic and political theory, constructivism – like critical theory (see [Chapter 4](#)) – is rooted in insights from social theory (e.g. Berger and Luckmann [1967](#); Giddens [1984](#)) and the philosophy of knowledge (Golinski [2005](#); Hacking [1999](#); Searle [1995](#)). Perhaps in consequence, constructivism does not predict outcomes, or offer definitive advice on how a state should act in the international arena. Instead, constructivism is best understood as a set of wagers about the way that social life is put together – wagers that centrally revolve around the fundamental importance of meaning to social action: ‘people act toward objects, including each other, on the basis of the meanings those objects have for them’ (Wendt [1999](#): 140). Constructivist IR theory is an application of that basic analytical commitment to the study of global politics, focusing in the first instance on state identity.

## **What does constructivism do? Identity and international institutions**

So what exactly are the basic tenets of constructivist IR? This is a very hard question to answer because, as a relatively new theory, there has not been as much time for people to work out in detail what the most central propositions of the constructivist way of doing things are. Important debates about [methodology](#) remain active among constructivists, and these debates have important implications for precisely *how* one should study the meaningful aspects of global politics (see Jackson [2016](#)). But there are some substantive points on which most constructivist IR scholars would agree, and those points make for a nice contrast with realism and liberalism.

A core concern of constructivists is [identity](#). Contrary to both realists and liberals, constructivists argue that the kinds of goals held by a state or other actor in world politics emerge from the actor's identity, and much constructivist research deals with the way in which states, state leaders and other actors conceptualise themselves, the roles they play and the purposes they serve in the world. These public conceptions in turn translate into the sorts of goals and interests that those actors pursue in their foreign policy. Whereas realists look to the objective situation formed by the [balance of power](#) (or material capabilities) between actors, and liberals look to the subjective calculations of rational strategy by those actors' leaders, constructivists suggest that processes of meaning-making and identity-shaping necessarily intervene between material factors and strategic decisions.

Another way of saying this is that identity in a constructivist account is [intersubjective](#): it doesn't exist 'out there' in the physical world and it doesn't just exist 'in here' inside our heads, but instead exists 'between us', in the social transactions that people have with each other. A scholar knows that there is an identity in play by noticing that when people deal with each other they do so on the basis of categorical distinctions. Thus, for example, we know there is a Kurdish identity operative in the world because we see Kurds interacting with

Kurds and non-Kurds and treating them differently. Intersubjective identity is public, and exercises its effects in observable transactions; at issue here is not belief, but rather the contours of acceptable action (Laffey and Weldes [1997](#)).

One implication of this notion of identity is that for constructivists, identity comes before and forms the basis of interests (Ringmar [1996](#); Wendt [1992](#): 398). Because we are a certain kind of people, forming a certain kind of community and holding certain values and ideals, we can and should engage in some courses of action and not others. For instance, take the so-called 'isolationist' US foreign policy discourse that claims 'because we are the paragon of liberty, we should not interfere in the political affairs of the world but should preserve our democratic purity so we can lead by example'. Alternatively, there is the competing claim that 'because we are the most powerful country in the world, we have an obligation to send our troops into different parts of the world where people are experiencing hardship and use our great strength to support them in their struggles for freedom'. These rival narratives, which issue from different self-understandings of US identity, point in very different policy directions, and support different conceptions of US interests. Both these discourses are expressed in US presidential speeches and congressional speeches all the time; they are identity claims, all taking the form 'because we are x, we can or should do y'. For a constructivist, all of social life is about those kinds of claims; politics, whether 'domestic' or 'international', is thus primarily about power struggles between people making different and competing kinds of identity claims.

This is particularly important to the study of international affairs because identity is not just about selves; identity is also about others who are 'not self', who are outside somewhere, beyond the borders – sometimes quite literally beyond the borders of a state, and sometimes more metaphorically excluded or disenfranchised from a community even though they may physically live in its

midst. So to say *we* are a certain kind of people is at the same time to say quite immediately that *they* are not – whoever *they* happen to be. A statement like ‘because we are *x*’ (where ‘*x*’ might be ‘free’, ‘democratic’, ‘capitalist’, etc.) always implies the existence of another group of people who are not-*x*, and by virtue of not being *x* they have to be treated differently. This quickly becomes politically salient, because particular others have to be treated differently by particular kinds of selves. The categorical distinction between selves and others affects how interactions between the two groups will unfold.

For example, imagine there is a group of people who practise a religion with which we are unfamiliar, and they engage in ritual acts that we find strange – and some adherents of that religion commit an act of political violence. It makes a difference whether we consider those people to be ‘heretics’ or ‘terrorists’ or ‘primitives’ or something else. Characterising them in any particular way raises different kinds of social and political implications. What do you do with heretics? Well, you either burn them or try to convert them. What do you do with terrorists? Well, you don’t really convert them. You don’t really burn them for their heresy. In the present day and age, you go after them and kill them, or you try to prosecute them as criminals – which is a very different set of options from those available when dealing with heretics. What do you do with primitives? Well, they’re primitive, so you either cordon them off and let them live in their pristine state of ‘non-modernity’ or you help to ‘modernise’, ‘develop’ or ‘civilise’ them. But you wouldn’t help to develop terrorists or heretics. How the self–other relationship is configured has certain kinds of implications for action. So when constructivists want to try to understand what is going on in world politics, they first look to the kind of self–other relationships that are in evidence.

Some of these self–other relationships are relatively durable because they are codified into rules and [norms](#) that govern interactions between entities in

world politics. Realists and liberals also acknowledge the existence and importance of rules and norms, but treat them very differently: for realists (see [Chapter 3](#)), rules and norms reflect the underlying distribution of power at the time that they were instituted, while for liberals (see [Chapter 2](#)), rules and norms are instrumental means for various political actors to coordinate their actions for mutual benefit. Rules and norms for both of these perspectives are [regulative](#) and pertain to behaviour (what is permitted, what is prohibited), whereas for constructivists, rules and norms are also [constitutive](#), in that they specify not just what an actor can do but, more fundamentally, what kind of actor that actor actually *is* (see [Box 7.2](#)). Thus sovereignty is a constitutive rule of the contemporary global political system that defines who the legitimate players on the international stage are (Reus-Smit [1999](#); Hall [1999](#)). Because constructivists treat rules and norms as codified identity claims and self–other relationships, following rules and adhering to norms – or challenging rules and defying norms – necessarily involves shifts in identity, and these shifts and changes give rise to different courses of action.

When it comes to the contemporary international system, constructivists agree with realists and liberals that the present order of things is largely, although not exclusively, dominated by sovereign states interacting under conditions of [anarchy](#). But anarchy as conceived by constructivists is a different kind of anarchy, because in the social space between states you have international law, state identities and many other self–other relationships – it is a very complex, busy space (see [Box 7.1](#) and [Table 7.1](#)). Constructivist anarchy, therefore, is *thick* anarchy; it is not thin anarchy as in realism, where the absence of a superior government requires states to take care of their own security and balance against each other by building up forces, which can inadvertently lead to conflict spirals, arms races and so on. It is not even the liberal notion of anarchy, in which states have the opportunity to strike mutually beneficial deals with each

other, busily comparing their utility functions and saying, in effect, ‘if I ally with you and we make a deal that will make us all richer, that will make us all better off!’

### **Box 7.1: Case study**

#### **‘Anarchy is what states make of it’**

Constructivists agree with the general realist picture of international relations as a condition of anarchy (defined in terms of the lack of a [hierarchical](#) formal world government), but introduce a conception of anarchy no longer ‘emptied of content’, as Nicholas Onuf ([1989](#): 185) puts it. Instead, they proffer a conception of *thick* anarchy, comprising rules, norms and institutions of the kind studied by the English School (see [Chapter 19](#)). Onuf ([1998](#): 62–3) argues that, despite appearances, international anarchy is not devoid of rules, norms and institutions; in fact, it forms a social arrangement with stable patterns of relations. It is just that this pattern of relations creates a condition where ‘no one state or group of states rules over the rest’.

Alexander Wendt ([1992](#)) further elaborates this argument by showing how international anarchy is socially constructed through the actions, interactions and self-understandings of states. Anarchy is not some pre-given structure; it is the result of social processes and practices, and is therefore intimately related to an intersubjective worldview held by states about the nature of the international environment (that it is a power-political system of self-help) and of states (that they are egoistic and self-regarding). It is because states internalise these understandings, socialising themselves into modes of behaviour consistent with a power-politics worldview, that anarchy takes the form it does. The key point for

constructivists is that ‘Self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. *Anarchy is what states make of it*’ (Wendt [1992](#): 395).

In a later work, Wendt ([1999](#): Chapter 6) elaborates three different logics or cultures of anarchy, which he terms Hobbesian, [Lockean](#) and [Kantian](#). Each produces a different worldview and different conception of self–other relations (see [Table 7.1](#)).

**Table 7.1** Three cultures of anarchy

Culture of anarchy	Worldview	Self–other relations	Corresponding IR theories
Hobbesian	Self-help; ‘war of all against all’; zero-sum security; survival depends on military power	Violence between enemies has no limits	Realism
Lockean	Mutual respect of sovereign rights; rules, norms and institutions create social expectations and regulate state behaviour; ‘live and let live’ system	Rivalry violence between rivals is self-limiting	English School, liberalism, constructivism
Kantian	Pluralistic	Friendship	Liberalism,

security communities;  ‘thinking like a team’; mutual commitment to peaceful relations; subordination of military power to the rule of law and reasoned argument	violence between friends is ruled out	critical theory, feminism, theories of global justice, cosmopolitan democracy
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The constructivist notion of anarchy is a lot thicker; floating around out there in that intersubjective space are rules and norms and other things that states must internalise in order to make their identity claims stick. Some of these rules and norms are so well established that constructivists call them ‘international institutions’, by which they do not necessarily mean formal organisations. Instead, constructivists use the word ‘institution’ in a more sociological sense – approximately the same way in which one might speak of the ‘institution’ of marriage: as a set of socially established expectations for how a particular relationship ought to work. Constructivists claim that one can see such institutions operating at the level of international society as well. One of the prime institutions to which constructivists like to point is the institution of the balance of power, which for a constructivist is a management strategy, or a mechanism by which great powers manage the international system (see [Chapter 21](#)). It is something for which states and their representatives consciously and deliberately strive. In realism, the balance of power is not necessarily a deliberately intended product; it is more of an inevitable

consequence of states looking to take care of their own security needs. In constructivism, by contrast, the balance of power is a means or procedure for dealing with various shifts of capabilities: over time, countries get rich, countries get poor, countries develop bigger armies, countries develop smaller armies, so the capacities of states are often in flux. The balance of power is one important way of dealing with this flux.

The balance of power, for constructivists, does not just mean that states should be made roughly equal to each other in terms of their capabilities; it also means that if one state does something and it is somehow going to be infringing another state's power, then that infringed state needs to get some compensation for standing back and allowing another state's power to be augmented. European states have long engaged in this kind of balance-of-power politics among themselves, and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries one of the main things that happened was that various great powers would partition states and annex territories as compensation for events elsewhere in the world, particularly to offset great power expansion through colonisation. (For a constructivist, colonisation itself can't be easily separated from the narratives of superiority and inferiority that supported the imperial identities of these great powers.) Consultation between great powers was built into this process too: the idea that great powers need to be consulted before anyone embarks on a course of action likely to unsettle the [status quo](#) or drastically alter the distribution of material capabilities. The point is that the institution of the balance of power is, for a constructivist, very closely linked to the identity of being a 'great power'. So, for constructivism, the identity 'great power' comes with certain rights and privileges, including consultation and compensation, which makes the great powers act like active managers of the international system.

Another international institution in which constructivists are particularly interested is [war](#). Realists and liberals are also interested in war, of course, but

constructivists approach the topic rather differently. If you are a constructivist, war is not just the use of deadly force; it is a social institution and, as such, comprises rules, laws and norms. Constructivists would first point to the fact that we have laws that govern war (for example, the Geneva Conventions); we have practices, protocols and codes about how war is supposed to be prosecuted (embodied in national military codes); we also have norms – binding sets of expectations such as, ‘do not deliberately target or kill civilians’ (see [Chapter 17](#)). While these expectations are not always perfectly reflected in political practice, violators of these norms do come in for criticism, and generally provide excuses and rationales for their deviation from the accepted rules of normal behaviour – something they would probably not do if the norm were not well established.

### **Norms and violence**

**Neta C. Crawford**

Discourse about norms usually refers to the relationship between dominant behaviours (‘the norm’) and normative beliefs. From that perspective, the question is: What is the relationship between normative beliefs (ideas of what is good and for what reason) and the ways humans behave and structure their world? This is the analytical question – the positive social science question – that I consider first.

The ancient Roman scholar Cicero said that ‘in time of war law is silent’. But when I think about war, I think about all the ways we limit the practice. War rarely goes to the most awful extremes. In every culture, it is almost always the case that the resort to war and the conduct of battle follow rules that limit violence. The question is, why?

There are three possible reasons why wars are limited. The first is the hope of reciprocity: if we restrain ourselves, we hope you will too. If you don't, we won't. We fear reprisal and so should you. The second reason is efficiency and expediency: if we restrain ourselves, we will not waste our energy and multiply our enemies. Absolute destruction vitiates victory in many cases. So one of Gandhi's arguments for nonviolence is expediency: 'Power based on love is a thousand times more effective and permanent than power derived from fear of punishment.' The third reason for restraint in war is the simple belief that to behave in certain ways – killing unarmed persons, poisoning, torturing – is simply morally wrong. When others sanction us because we have violated a norm, they do so because of their belief about what behaviours are right and what are beyond the pale. And so, when we make a calculation that it is to our advantage to use force, we might argue that force is necessary, and that certain limits may be disregarded. This is the reasoning behind [international humanitarian law](#), also known as the law of war. The norm of military necessity thus trumps the norms of non-combatant immunity. Thus, for instance, the Additional Protocol I of the [Geneva Convention](#) (1977), Article 57 says civilians should be protected but that protection is subject to military advantage. Parties to the treaty should 'refrain from deciding to launch any attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated'.

Further:

an attack shall be cancelled or suspended if it becomes apparent that the objective is not a military one or is subject to special protection or that the attack may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury

to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

The Geneva Protocols are an embodiment of the dominant normative beliefs about war and restraint in war. They are deeply ambivalent, reflecting the principled respect for human rights and the idea that war must be limited while at the same time embodying a form of [utilitarian](#) reasoning that stresses military necessity. The 'humanitarian' law thus sanctions violence. The belief that certain uses of force are wrong is a principled position that should not yield so easily to the utilitarian calculus of military necessity. Limiting the occasions and conduct of war because we desire that others do so, or because we fear reprisal, or because we desire to be more efficient, is not a principled limit on the use of force. In such a view, 'respect' for the other is simply a healthy regard for how the other might now, or in the future, hurt us. The idea of the normality of violence is not challenged or destabilised.

Which brings me to the normative question of what the relationship should be between norms of violence and democratic norms. This is connected to something else Gandhi said about war: 'The science of war leads one to dictatorship, pure and simple. The science of nonviolence alone can lead one to pure democracy.' By 'pure democracy', I take Gandhi to mean respectful deliberation and participation by all. It is the opposite of coercion. This is deep democracy, not the Freedom House version of democracy, which is simply the freedom to vote in order choose representatives who then, it is hoped, deliberate and negotiate on your behalf.

So, as Gandhi was implying and as Randall Forsberg stated explicitly in her work on the end of war as an institution, democracy is not simply the sum of the political right to vote and freedoms to associate and speak freely. Democracy is an institutional arrangement and a set of attitudes and beliefs that create the opportunity to deliberate, to argue. And if we are to argue fairly, with some hope of coming to an uncoerced understanding with another, we must renounce violence and the threat of violence. We must listen and be willing to be persuaded. This is what human rights and political rights share: the renunciation of violent means to resolve disputes. Forsberg believed that ‘democratic institutions have prompted, or paralleled, a growing rejection of violence as a means of achieving political or economic ends within and between nations’. For Forsberg, it is not an exaggeration to say that democracy and a commitment to nonviolence are synonymous: ‘commitment to nonviolence lies at the core of democratic institutions’. She continues:

Though little recognized, the renunciation of violence as a means to any ends except defense is as much a cornerstone of democratic institutions as its widely recognized counterpart, freedom of expression and other civil liberties. Commitment to nonviolence protects and preserves freedom of expression and other civil liberties by precluding intimidation or coercion by violence or the threat of violence. Within democracies, wherever nonviolence is not the rule ... other democratic rights and freedoms are lost or severely compromised (cited in Crawford [2009](#): 117).

The renunciation of a decision to use force is the first step to deep democracy. And deliberative democracy brings to politics a quality that Aristotle ([2009](#):

142), in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, called friendship:

Friendship seems too to hold states together, and lawgivers to care more for it than for justice; for concord seems to be something like friendship, and this they aim at most of all, ... and when men are friends they have no need of justice; while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality.

We also have various kinds of institutions like the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent), which has the very odd right and ability to drive onto active battlefields and tend the wounded – this is strange because most countries respect the ICRC and permit it to do this, and to inspect prisoner-of-war camps and the like. So the institution of war includes this [humanitarian](#) practice to which many states adhere: they actually let the ICRC into the middle of a war zone, where they cannot be harmed or targeted by belligerents. Further, each side lets the ICRC tend to the *enemy's* wounded soldiers, not just their own. This may not make a lot of sense to a realist or to a liberal, but a constructivist would say this *does* make sense precisely because war is a social institution; it is not just something in which people engage with no limits. War itself is regulated and has social meaning attached to it. The very fact that we have war crimes and courts for prosecuting such crimes is evidence of the ethical and normative boundaries within which war is supposed to be conducted, and reflects the social character of this international institution.

These points about war and the balance of power all add up to the idea that the international institutions that exist 'out there' in world politics provide sets of standards to which states can be held accountable. Think for a moment about an example closer to home: the speed limit on a major highway. On most highways in the United States, for example, the speed limit is 65 miles (100 kilometres) per hour. While this does not guarantee that everybody drives under the speed limit, it does give the police the authority to penalise drivers who come breezing

through at 90 miles (150 kilometres) per hour. Likewise, international institutions provide standards and expectations, not guarantees of specific rule-governed behaviour. Realist sceptics will sometimes say an international law is not really worth much, because in the absence of anyone enforcing it hierarchically, states can violate it any time they choose. International lawyers – most of whom are constructivists in practice – would claim that is equivalent to saying there is no such thing as a law against murder because murders are still committed. Of course murders are still committed; that is not the point. The point is that the law establishes a certain set of expectations and standards by prohibiting murder. So when people do violate laws, they risk prosecution. The sceptic may ask: Who punishes states when they violate international laws and norms? International lawyers and constructivists would retort by saying that often states mete out punishment to violators of international law among themselves. States – sometimes multilaterally, sometimes unilaterally – decide to intervene in order to provide some redress. In other cases, the enforcement mechanism may be a transnational social movement, which is able to use the socially established expectation of correct conduct as a way to shame a state and its leaders into changing their course of action (Keck and Sikkink [1998](#)). The chief point in all this, for constructivists, is that international anarchy is a thickly textured social environment comprising normative principles, standards and expectations, the purposes ascribed to state identities and the cultural components of legitimacy.

## **Constructivism's understanding of change in the international system**

One of the principal implications of this constructivist account of global politics involves the way that we understand *change*. For constructivists, stability is not presumed in a way that it tends to be for either realists or liberals. An international system – indeed, any relatively stable system of social action – requires effort to sustain, effort that is *joint* inasmuch as it relies on the coordinated activity of multiple actors. Instead of starting out by taking for granted that there just is this given, naturally existing thing called the international system, and that our primary task is to figure out how it works and how we should live in it (as explanatory and normative theorists do respectively), constructivists emphasise the social effort that goes into making and maintaining the present international system. On the one hand, this means things could have been different; it means we did not have to have the kind of organisation of world politics that we have right now. Yet it also means that things still could be different in the future because there is nothing natural or necessary about the way in which we presently organise world politics. World politics could actually be organised in a radically different way in the future. There is a lot at stake in this idea that these social arrangements (including international systems) are produced by social action rather than being natural or brute facts (see [Box 7.2](#)).

### **Box 7.2 Terminology**

#### **John R. Searle on facts and rules**

**Brute and institutional facts: [W]e need to distinguish between *brute facts* such as the fact that the sun is ninety-three million miles from the earth and *institutional facts* such as the fact that Clinton is president. Brute facts exist independently of any human institutions; institutional facts**

**can exist only within human institutions. Brute facts require the institution of language in order that we can state the facts, but the brute facts themselves exist quite independently of language or of any other human institution.**

(Searle [1995](#): 27)

**Regulative and constitutive rules: Some rules regulate antecedently existing activities. For example, the rule ‘drive on the right-hand side of the road’ regulates driving; but driving can exist prior to the existence of that rule. However, some rules do not merely regulate, they also create the very possibility of certain activities. Thus the rules of chess do not regulate an antecedently existing activity ... Rather, the rules of chess create the very possibility of playing chess.**

([1995](#): 27–8)

Constructivists argue that stability in social systems is produced by everyday practices, everyday behaviours and everyday ways of acting and interacting (Adler and Pouliot [2011](#)). So a constructivist thinking about a university, for instance, might say that universities are not natural or brute facts, that they are not given in the nature of things. The fact that there continues to be a university in a particular place day after day is a social or institutional fact, and that takes work to sustain. There are many things that people do to maintain the university, not just in the physical sense of disposing of waste and maintaining buildings and facilities, but

in the cultural or social sense: there have to be ways of administering people using the categories of 'student', 'professor' and 'staff'; there have to be organisational means of dividing bodies of knowledge into distinct disciplines; in fact, there have to be all kinds of little ways in which the daily life of you and everyone else at the university ends up reproducing its existence in this particular social arrangement, because there is nothing natural about it. If all the people were to disappear, there would be no university. The university, as an institutional fact, would not exist independently of social actions and intersubjective understandings. For instance, you cannot just walk into the library and take home a book; you have to show your ID card and check it out. That is one of those everyday practices that reinscribes the university, that reproduces the university's organisational existence at the same time as it reproduces your identity as a student. There are also joint understandings and formal rules about borrowing and returning books. Those are the sorts of everyday practices and activities that create the effect of a stable university.

Constructivists would say the same thing happens in world politics writ large. A case from a few years ago illustrates the point: Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006) was a dictator in Chile who, like many dictators, managed to secure for himself sovereign immunity before leaving office in 1990. This immunity meant he was not prosecutable within Chile for any of his alleged crimes against the people, many of which were extremely well documented. Since he gave himself immunity, he did not have to worry about these things. In 1998, Pinochet travelled to Britain for a medical procedure, whereupon he was arrested. Spain – which often likes to think of itself as having certain special responsibilities for Latin American affairs, as part of a general identity-claim recurrent in Spanish

foreign policy – had asked Britain to extradite Pinochet to Spain so it could put him on trial for numerous violations of domestic law and international law and crimes against humanity (Roht-Arriaza [2006](#)). Spain's extradition request raised the question of what [sovereignty](#) means, because if the principle of sovereignty grants sovereigns the right to exercise authority and power without external interference, and to confer immunity on former heads of state, then Pinochet should not have been subject to prosecution – at least in Chile. But here we have a situation in which people were challenging this understanding of sovereignty, advancing a contrary identity-claim with different implications for social action. Essentially, the Spanish claim was that human rights law trumps sovereign immunity, because people are human beings before they are citizens and heads of states (see [Chapter 32](#)). Thus we have an identity contest: which set of expectations, and which set of identities, should dominate? To whom are obligations owed: sovereign states, or 'humanity'?

In the end, Britain's courts concluded that while they had the right to extradite Pinochet, they would decline extradition because Pinochet was a frail, sick old man; they extended mercy to the accused war criminal. What is interesting about this decision is that it reinscribed certain understandings about international politics in everyday practice. By claiming it had the right to extradite Pinochet, Britain was affecting a small but important shift in the limits of sovereignty or the capacity of sovereign actors to do things, because if Britain does possess that right – as it claimed – then sovereign states do not have the ability to immunise former dictators from indictment under international law. But even if the British court had decided something else – for example, if it had judged that Britain had no right to extradite Pinochet – it *also* would have

reinscribed a certain understanding of sovereignty in everyday practice. Either way, state identities are being reproduced or reinscribed. Constructivists would argue that it is exactly these kinds of moments, these kinds of everyday decisions, that produce the greater social aggregates that we actually end up seeing in the world. Thus we have to investigate how those things happen in order to figure out what is going on in world politics. One of the ways constructivists like to do this is by pointing out that if you take these kinds of everyday practices seriously, you very quickly run into state and national identity as an important source of the reasons why states do things. Group identity pertains to who and what a people are, but also therefore what kinds of actions they can legitimately perform that are consistent with their identity. The logic goes like this: because we are a *certain* kind of people, we will do *certain* kinds of things. For constructivists, this is not just a result of material factors, and certainly not just the result of genetic factors or any other supposedly natural traits. A group of people will not act in a particular way just because they possess some set of common ethnic characteristics, or because they happen to live together. Rather, what is of interest is how notions of commonality are deployed in practice, and what kinds of political effects they produce (Neumann [1999](#)).

States, their populations and their leaders can also be socialised; they can be taught, in effect, to adhere to certain kinds of norms. They can be placed in particular positions from which they conclude certain things and act accordingly. Constructivists suggest that it is sometimes possible to '[alter-cast](#)' another actor by starting to treat that actor in the way that you would actually like them to be, whereupon the actor starts responding accordingly because you haven't given them many other choices. For example, treating the Soviet Union as if it were no longer

the evil [communist](#) empire but in fact an insolvent country looking for friendship and financial assistance might actually help to *produce* that situation because it structures certain types of behaviour around that new notion. Constructivists see this kind of socialisation operating throughout world politics – sometimes informally through [alter-casting](#), sometimes through more formalised procedures. For example, when a country joins the European Union, it has to take on a whole series of regulations called the *acquis communautaire*, which is a thick document of all the European Union laws and regulations that must be incorporated into its domestic legal structure. That is a relatively formal kind of process where, by virtue of signing up to rules that they are compelled to follow, states are socialised into new self-understandings and behaviours. In either case, the same basic process is at work, which is that actors take on and internalise various expectations that they find floating around in the intersubjective social environment, and incorporate them into their own senses of self, redefining their purposes and relations to other states accordingly.

Constructivists also argue that identity can change from the inside after certain shifts in domestic political balances. This is not just about domestic pressure groups, and not just about the interests that they have; it is about how different domestic groups within a political entity like a state have very different visions about what the state's identity actually *is*. To reiterate, state identity is not naturally given: it takes sustained work, joint effort and social practice in order to continue to exist. When new governments are formed, they may appeal to different identity narratives and envision different interests while implementing their foreign and domestic policies; this inevitably leads to the articulation of different conceptions of the state's 'moral purpose' (Devetak and True

[2006](#); Reus-Smit [1999](#)). This suggests not only that domestic political change can have an impact on fundamental self-images and self-understandings about a state's identity and role in international relations, but that such self-images and self-understandings are perennially open to contestation and challenge. It is not simply the state's preferences that are in flux during a change in domestic political rule, but the very meaning of what the state is and how it should behave.

### ***Identity and governance***

Identity change is particularly important to constructivists because a lot of things are anchored in how an actor thinks of itself. In some instances, identity change can produce global governance. This is the notion that states involved in international arrangements are not simply participating in instrumental bargaining, but rather successful international organisations actually rest on shared principles and norms that states have incorporated into their own identities. The end result is what some have called 'governance without government' (Rosenau and Czempiel [1992](#)): international organisations like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization actually have authority, not just control. They are not only fair ways of coordinating actions between states; they actually have their own authority as a result of the fact that the shared norms on which they rest are incorporated into the self-conceptions of all the various participating parties.

For instance, think about the United Nations, which has the ability to create something as a [peacekeeping](#) mission that was not a peacekeeping mission before. Yesterday they were just armed forces in a foreign country, today they form part of a UN mission because a vote was taken and all of a sudden the situation changes dramatically; the armed forces

now wear blue helmets, fly the UN flag, requisition UN vehicles and uphold UN resolutions. Less symbolically, the kinds of things that you can legitimately do in that combat zone are now different, because the *status* of a UN peacekeeping mission is different from the status of armed forces in a foreign country. Constructivists would say that this change is possible because it is accepted that the United Nations has the authority to change the status of armed forces from belligerents to peacekeepers.

Consider, as another example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). One of the things the IMF is authorised to do is decide which countries are creditworthy and how creditworthy they are. Constructivists would say that is not just a technical decision, but a political and perhaps a cultural decision. Declaring that a state has strong economic health, and is a place to which one can lend money (or not), is a shift in that state's public identity – a shift with real consequences in terms of the flow of capital. There is always room for discretion, so these calculations are never simple technical calculations; they always involve, at least implicitly, inferences about future action based on a putative grasp of what kind of state actor is being evaluated. Such inferences may shape judgements about whether a particular potential loan recipient is 'trustworthy' or is 'genuinely committed' to a program of privatisation, and will not simply abandon it as soon as it gets an IMF loan. Such determinations and declarations are not made by other sovereign states, but by global economic institutions (GEIs) that command the authority to make those determinations (see [Chapter 25](#)).

If you want to go one step further in terms of what GEIs are actually capable of, consider Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). An SDR is effectively an IOU that the IMF writes to a particular country. So, when

a country comes to the IMF and says, 'We have problems, we can't pay back our debts', the IMF might elect to extend SDRs to that country instead of money. The country might then use the SDRs as a way of paying back their debt to other countries. In effect, the IMF is inventing its own currency. Despite the fact that we live in a 'world of states', the expanding complex of rules is giving rise to a system of governance without government, where international organisations are actually tremendously important actors with power derived from their normative underpinnings. So powerful are these global economic institutions that they are now capable of launching the equivalent of a new currency. Global governance is not limited to interstate organisations, but also encompasses numerous [non-state actors](#) of various kinds (see [Chapter 23](#)). For example, global movements like Amnesty International (AI) form part of the overall system of global governance to the extent that AI is able to issue reports on human rights abuses that the global public is as attentive to as anxious state leaders are; thus non-governmental organisations (NGOs) help to regulate what countries can and cannot legitimately do. That, say constructivists, is only possible because those NGOs have actually acquired some authority or have succeeded in embedding the ideals and norms they champion in that intersubjective space between states. In this specific case, AI's authority to make certain claims about human rights has helped to set the standard for what good human rights practice actually is, regardless of the fact that it commands almost no military, financial or other more traditional instruments of power. State leaders may make excuses, they may deny the charges, but the authority of AI is such that there are very few complete rejections of its reports or its standards, and international public opinion looks to AI as authoritative and trustworthy. This in turn rests on issues of identity,

and the way that AI (aligned and allied with other non-governmental organisations) has managed to become an important voice in the general process whereby state identities are articulated, and state leaders are held accountable for their actions in terms of those identities.

### ***International conflict and security communities***

One especially noteworthy development that constructivists think sometimes happens in international politics is that a number of states identify with each other so strongly that they no longer seriously consider war among themselves as a real possibility (Wæver [1998a](#)). Constructivists think that under certain circumstances states can form a [security community](#) in which individual states have an extremely positive identification with each other – a very specific kind of self–other relationship in which the former other becomes an extension of the self. States in a security community regard all of the other states in the community as selves rather than others, sharing deeply held common values, interests and commitments. Disputes within such security communities are resolved peacefully. In fact, states are expected to work together to ensure that vital interests are secured as smoothly and efficiently as possible through close coordination of activities, whether these activities relate to international trade and commerce, international development or some other sort of collaboration to solve a persistent problem, such as the proper management of fish populations that continually migrate between various states' territorial waters. These matters should be resolved peacefully inside the security community, because the states involved share common interests and commitments which in time may come to constitute a common identity (for example, the European Union).

Part of the reason why constructivists are so interested in the formation of security communities is because they can dramatically change the context in which states interact. In other words, they can modify and ameliorate the condition of interstate anarchy. When a friend says something that annoys you, you are more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt, think they probably had a bad day and ask them for an explanation. But if a total stranger says exactly the same thing, your reaction is likely to be quite different, perhaps provoking an angry or even aggressive response. Being in a community with someone changes how you react to their behaviour. You treat your friends differently than you treat other people, because human beings work and think in bounded categories as we try to figure out what is going on in the world and react appropriately. The key point here is that being in a security community changes the context of interstate interaction: disputes are likely to be resolved peacefully when they arise. Outside such security communities, however, there is always a risk that, in the absence of friendly understanding, the dispute may intensify into something not containable by peaceful methods.

Constructivists, like critical theorists (see [Chapter 4](#)), have argued for many years that one way to create community at the international level is to increase transactions between private citizens and commercial actors, and to establish other cross-cultural networks and exchanges between peoples. If you think about the Fulbright program or the Rotary Scholarships program or any other kind of study abroad experience, one of their functions, say constructivists, is simply to have more interaction between private citizens so people know more about each other and therefore can help to form a community. Some states also directly and publicly address the issue of conflict and the reduction thereof through

material and moral support for sub-national and international [peacebuilding](#) and conflict-resolution organisations. To name just a few, the US Institute of Peace (United States), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sweden) and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (Ghana) all seek to develop, share and normalise peace and conflict-resolution practices while supporting conflict resolution communities throughout the world. By shifting state identities, such peacebuilding efforts may contribute to the formation and reinforcement of security communities.

One other necessary condition for the formation of a security community is some sort of shared narrative of commonality, some notion that the members of a group belong together, share common values or ideals, and are willing to share a common future. One cannot just make that up out of whole cloth; rather, one has to use existing cultural resources to start building community and its supporting narratives. ‘Europe’ is a great example of this: constructivists note that the idea of Europe as a community has been around for hundreds of years. People (especially intellectuals) have been talking about it since the Crusades, and circulating the idea that countries in that particular part of the globe *belong together* and form some sort of natural unity. Not only was there a lot of interaction between this group of countries, but there was also a shared story of belonging to a common enterprise. This shared story made possible a ‘[nesting](#)’ strategy (Jackson [2005](#)), whereby a group of actors was collectively subsumed under a single larger identity. A nesting strategy, like a strategy of alter-casting, can produce actor-level identity change, but the direction of influence is different: where alter-casting involves one actor shifting another’s identity by cajoling it into certain attitudes and behaviours, nesting involves a group of actors using

a common narrative to reframe all of their interactions, changing them from contacts between separate states to transactions between the members of a larger cultural and political entity.

Along these lines, after World War II, there was a very deliberate attempt to eliminate the possibility of war between some of the primary belligerents, and particularly between France and Germany. These two countries were at war more often than not for large portions of European history, and a lot of major wars involved the French and the Germans on either side of the battle-lines. After World War II, there was a very deliberate effort to say no, we should reframe this because we are all part of the same community and we do not resolve our disputes with military force (Parsons [2006](#)). So the European Union was born as states were nested within it – originally it was the European Economic Community, and then it transformed into the European Community and ultimately the European Union. For a constructivist, this process was not just about militarily balancing against the Russians or anybody else, and not just about gains in trade; it was about change in the identities of states and their populations. The common story of Europe, incorporated into the identities of a group of states via a nesting strategy, helped to construct a community where war between its members has been rendered unthinkable.

## **Conclusion**

The constructivist approach enriches, at the cost of complexifying, the study of world politics. When *meaning* becomes a component to explaining state action, issues such as anarchy and power become much more contingent and case-specific. At the same time, a treatment of identity based on meaning opens up wide opportunities concerning what

may be possible when those identities begin to shift and change. Although constructivists are hesitant to predict the future, they are never limited in exploring the possibilities; change, as always, is the only thing that stays the same.

### **Discussion questions**

**7.1** What is state identity and how does it influence world politics?

**7.2** How is a constructivist understanding of change different from a liberal or a realist one?

**7.3** How does a constructivist understanding of institutions explain state actions?

**7.4** How might a constructivist approach to world politics inform an understanding of the causes and ways of ending interstate war?

**7.5** What are the strengths of the constructivist approach to world politics compared with other IR theories? What are its weaknesses?

### *Further reading*

Barkin, J. Samuel 2010, *Realist constructivism: Rethinking international relations theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An attempt to synthesise realism's insights into power and constructivism's understanding of method.*

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Katzenstein, Peter (ed.) 1996, *The culture of national security: Norms and identity in world politics*, New York: Columbia University Press. *An important early collection of essays by leading constructivists on a range of different*

security issues.

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Reus-Smit, Christian 1999, *The moral purpose of the state: Culture, social identity, and institutional rationality in international relations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *An historical account of the social construction of the state and its purpose.*

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Ruggie, John Gerard 1998, *Constructing the world polity: Essays on international institutionalization*, London: Routledge. *An insightful collection of essays on multilateralism and the historical transition to the modern states-system from a constructivist perspective.*

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Wendt, Alexander 1999, *Social theory of international politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *A seminal account of a constructivist theory of international relations.*

# Theories of global justice



**Richard Shapcott**

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[Justice and international relations](#)

[Why justice is global](#)

[What is a just global order?](#)

[\*Peter Singer: Global ethics\*](#)

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## **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the theories of international relations that have as their principal goal the transformation of the global international order so that it better meets the objectives of global justice. It begins with a discussion of the nature of

justice as it is understood in the political context, then addresses the [cosmopolitan](#) argument that principles of justice ought to apply to the world as a whole and not just within or between individual [states](#). Next, it discusses the secondary argument that this requires significant reform of the relations between states and the democratising of the international realm. Finally, it examines the principal accounts of global justice, including Rawlsian liberalism (see [Boxes 8.1](#) and [8.3](#)) and cosmopolitan [democracy](#).

Unlike other theories of international relations, theories of global justice are explicitly evaluative theories. They seek to discuss and identify the proper rules for ordering society and the relationships between its constituent parts. In particular, they assess the values that ought to guide social and political life and how they are embodied in institutions and practices. In the language of political [theory](#), they discuss ‘the right and the good’. They do not merely explain or understand politics, but assess it [normatively](#) on the basis of ethical and moral grounds. The core concerns of these types of theories are the meaning of justice, equality, freedom and rights, and their relationship with [power](#), violence and interests. Until relatively recently, theories of this type have been rare in the [discipline](#). Normative or evaluative thought in international relations has been concerned mostly with the meaning of [sovereignty](#) and the norm of non-intervention rather than with justice. Cosmopolitan theorists, however, argue that the vocabularies of justice and democracy *do* apply to the relations between states and, furthermore, that there is a moral imperative to transform the international realm into one that better conforms to these values.

## **Justice and international relations**

‘Justice’ is a term that has many meanings and can be used in many ways. Hedley Bull ([1983](#)), in his much-discussed Hagey lectures on justice in international relations, used it to refer to what is more commonly known as international ethics. Lawyers use the term to denote conformity with legal rulings and process, in the sense that justice has been done when the law has been followed and upheld. However, for political philosophers, justice is associated with the values of fairness and equality. Justice as a general concept means to treat like cases alike and to treat people according to fair rules. Fairness of this sort is embodied in the value of equality because to treat people equally means to treat them in a like fashion. Therefore, for political philosophers, justice usually is related to the value of equality of all human beings. Justice occurs when people are treated equally by political, economic and social institutions and laws. Much of contemporary political philosophy has been concerned with discussing how people are equal and how this equality should be recognised in law and society.

Justice can also be discussed in terms of substantive and procedural justice. *Substantive justice* refers to the equality of outcomes and the distribution of wealth or power – that is, distributive justice. *Procedural justice* refers to a fair process or mechanism for deciding who should get what. For example, a world in which there was no poverty might be considered substantively just, but if that situation was arrived at by discriminating against certain categories of people – like women – then we might think it was unjust in a procedural sense. Democracy is considered just because it treats all people as equal by giving them the vote, but it is unjust when, for instance, women are denied the vote. Even if all women were wealthy or financially equal to men it would still be considered *procedurally* unjust if they were not entitled to vote.

Arguably the most important recent political formulation of justice has come from the liberal philosopher John Rawls ([1971](#)), who argues that justice

begins with the ‘basic structure’ of society, by which he means ‘the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation’ (1971: 7). In other words, to be just, society must examine its basic assumptions about who has rights, or equal moral standing, and duties, and who benefits materially from the production of goods and services. Rawls’ theory of justice is both a procedural account of justice and a substantive one, concerned with distribution of wealth and advantage.

While Rawls’ particular conclusion as to the content of justice is often contested (see [Box 8.1](#)), his general understanding of the focus of justice is accepted implicitly or explicitly by most cosmopolitan writers. Cosmopolitans concerned with global justice are predominantly, but not exclusively, concerned with the basic structure of global society – that is, with the ways in which the rules of global order distribute rights, duties and the benefits of social cooperation (that is, economic activity). Many cosmopolitans directly apply Rawls’ theory to the international realm (a move he resisted). These writers are often concerned primarily with distributive and substantive justice, in particular the problems of global inequality and poverty (see [Chapter 27](#)). The most ambitious of them claim that any global order should guarantee equality of rights and goods for all people everywhere; this view is called *global egalitarianism* (see below). Global egalitarianism dominates academic discussion of global distributive justice. These cosmopolitans emphasise institutional duties and envision a radically transformed global order that conforms to principles of global justice.

#### **Box 8.1:** Discussion points

##### **John Rawls on justice**

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought ... [L]aws and institutions no matter how efficient and well arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.

(Rawls [1971](#): 3)

[T]he justice of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned and on the economic opportunities and social conditions in the various sectors of society.

([1971](#): 7)

[S]ociety is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage.

([1971](#): 4)

However, others place more emphasis on developing procedural accounts of global justice as a means of delivering a fair global order, and it is these arguments that mostly are associated with the idea of global democracy (see Cabrera, [2004](#)). For procedural accounts, justice requires not only an end to world poverty, but a legitimate and democratic means for negotiating different interests and identities. However, despite important differences, both accounts are concerned loosely with making the basic global structure of society just or equal.

## Why justice is global

The question of global justice is an extension of a broader, more general issue: the nature of any duties we may have to humanity. Western ethical thought has been torn by a tension between the duties we have to each other as citizens of the same state or community, and the duties we have to each other simply by virtue of our humanity – the duties we have not just to fellow nationals but to everyone else (Linklater [1990](#); Nussbaum [1996](#)). Therefore, before any cosmopolitan principles of justice can be delivered, the case has to be made for why justice and morality in general should be global rather than merely national.

The major alternative to cosmopolitanism is characterised as [nationalism](#) (in academic debates, this is sometimes conflated with [communitarianism](#) or statism). Nationalists perceive an ethical demarcation between fellow nationals and the rest of humanity. Statists defend the state as a means to realise national and communal self-determination and reject the global egalitarian goals of placing states under a single global standard. While in the past this position has often presented a very stark choice involving indifference to the suffering of outsiders, most contemporary arguments of this type are less severe. In contrast to cosmopolitans, nationalists and statistes argue that states have at most only minimal duties not to harm, to aid in case of emergency and to help uphold minimal human rights standards, but these are not duties of justice.

Many of these critics do not argue that we should be morally indifferent to foreigners, but only that the conditions for extending substantial moral obligations beyond the state do not exist (see Miller [2008](#)). For these critics, justice requires a state and/or a shared culture that provide the basic values from which principles of justice are determined. Thus, for instance, Rawls' theory of justice relies on a presupposition of the existence of a basic core of liberal society. For the critics of global justice, these conditions simply do not apply globally; indeed, they are exacerbated by the sheer diversity of different conceptions of the 'good' present in the world (see Valentini [2011](#)).

Against this position, cosmopolitans argue either that sufficient conditions do exist or, even if they do not, we are not relieved of global obligations. If we think that all humans are equal, then there are no good reasons for limiting our conception of morality to our own community; we must instead treat everybody according to the same principles. Many people think and act out their lives assuming that the national community, and the people they see on a daily basis – like family – are their primary moral realm of concern. This means that they do not consider themselves obliged to help people in distant countries, nor do they believe it is morally wrong to think in this way. Cosmopolitans, however, argue that distance, difference and membership of a particular community should not inhibit or obstruct our moral responsibilities to the wider community of humankind. We should not let our sense of personal connection to some people prevent us from having a sense of obligation and duty to all people. For most cosmopolitans, this means not merely that we should consider outsiders as equals, but that it is immoral not to. As Martha Nussbaum argues:

If we really do believe that all human beings are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights, we are morally required to think about what that conception requires us to do with and for the rest of the world (1996: 13). The burden of argument thus falls to those who seek to defend exclusionary moral communities and practices, not the other way round.

### **Equality and the categorical imperative**

While not all cosmopolitan approaches are strictly [Kantian](#), most are nonetheless consistent with his central premise of moral universality. This is expressed in the principle of the categorical imperative, which states, ‘Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it shall become a universal law’ (quoted in Linklater [1990](#): 100). We must always ask first

whether we are conforming not with a national or particularistic law, but with a universal, or universalisable, law. This means that ‘if a person acts on a principle, which he could not wish another person to employ in his action towards him, that principle is not a moral one’ (1990: 100).

For Kant, the most important expression of this imperative was the idea that humans should ‘act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end’ (quoted in Linklater 1990: 101).

Acceptance of the categorical imperative means a number of things, but most importantly it leads to a critique of state sovereignty and nationalism – not only as practical obstacles, but as immoral institutions. The states-system is immoral because it is impossible to treat others as ends in themselves in a system that is ruled not by law and collective will, but by necessity and force. As a result of this critique, the major tasks of cosmopolitan theory are to defend moral universalism, to develop an account of an alternative political order based on it and to explore what it might mean to follow Kant’s imperative in a world divided into separate communities.

### **The requirements of justice**

The first of these tasks has been developed in at least two different ways by [liberals](#) like Charles Beitz, Darrel Moellendorf and Thomas Pogge, and by *critical theorists* like Andrew Linklater. This section begins with the more dominant, but not necessarily more persuasive, account of the liberals.

Following Pogge (1994: 89), we can characterise liberal cosmopolitanism as individualistic, impartial and universalistic:

First, individualism: ultimate units are human beings, or persons ... Second, universality: the status of ultimate unit of concern attaches to every living human

being equally, not merely to some subset ... Third, generality (impartiality): persons are the ultimate unit of concern for everyone – not only for their compatriots, fellow religionists, or such like.

For Beitz (1994: 124) (see [Box 8.2](#)), ‘two essential elements define a point of view as cosmopolitan: it is inclusive and non-perspectival’. In other words, because there are no morally significant differences between people as people, the scope of morality is universal. In addition, equality requires impartiality between competing interests. If we are to treat everyone as equal then we need ‘impartial ... consideration of the claims of each person who would be affected by our choices’ (Beitz 1994: 125). The only way to do this is to adopt a position that stands above all differences of culture, interest, class and most importantly nationality: to be impartial towards all particular affiliations, associations and contexts is to take account of the good of the whole (Beitz 1991). From an impartial perspective, national boundaries are morally irrelevant, or at best of secondary significance. These arguments all amount to the necessity to think globally, rather than nationally, when it comes to questions of justice.

#### **Box 8.2:** Discussion points

##### **Charles Beitz on impartiality**

By ‘inclusive’ I mean that a cosmopolitan view encompasses all local points of view. It seeks to see the whole of which there are the parts. By ‘non-perspectival’ I mean that a cosmopolitan view seeks to see each part of the whole in its true relative size ... the proportions of things are accurately presented so that they can be faithfully compared. If local viewpoints can be said to be partial, then a cosmopolitan viewpoint is impartial.

The commitment to impartiality is also shared by [utilitarian](#) cosmopolitans like Peter Singer, who argues that in the face of persistent global hunger and dire poverty, which leads to the avoidable death of millions every year, people in affluent countries are in a comparable position to someone watching a child drown in a pond for fear of getting their trousers wet. If we think it wrong to let the child die, then we ought also think it wrong to let millions die from preventable hunger and poverty. If we have the capacity to help, then we have the obligation to help. Thus, knowing as we do that many people starve, we ought to consider ourselves morally obligated to help those distant foreigners before we help less needy fellow nationals (Singer [2002](#)). This is simply required by an impartial and universalist understanding of morality.

### **Interdependence and globalisation**

However, perhaps the most persuasive characteristic of many cosmopolitan arguments is an emphasis on economic [interdependence](#). Rawls argues that justice is only possible in the presence of a ‘system of social cooperation for mutual gain’ (see [Box 8.3](#)), which produces a surplus product. He argues that the international realm does not resemble a system for mutual advantage, so justice is inapplicable (see Rawls [1999](#)). However, most critics believe that Rawls’ conclusion does not follow from his argument, and that he is open to further cosmopolitan interpretation (Brock [2009](#); Caney [2001](#); Moellendorf [2002](#)). The weight of scholarship today suggests that it is no longer possible to justify treating states as self-enclosed, isolated systems as Rawls did. Instead, there is a single global economic network of interdependence. States are intricately

interconnected, and very few – if any – can claim to be entirely outside the global economic order. As a result, we can claim that the equivalent of a scheme for mutual gain exists: ‘All that is required [for justice] is that interdependence produce benefits and burdens; the role of a principle of distributive justice, then ... would be to specify what a fair distribution of those benefits and burdens would be like’ (Beitz [1979](#): 153). Much of the current debate accepts this idea – or something like it. Differences exist over whether this recognition necessarily requires a global egalitarianism response or some other less demanding account of justice (see Gilabert [2012](#); Hassoun [2012](#); Risse [2012](#), Valentini [2011](#); Vernon [2010](#)).

### **Box 8.3:** Discussion points

#### **Rawls’ social contract: The original position**

Rawls’ social contract is the result of a thought experiment in which members of a closed society have been told they must design its basic rules. The catch is that no individual can know where they may end up within this society. They may be wealthy, poor, black, white, male, female, talented, intelligent and so on. All they know about themselves is that they have a capacity to conceive of ‘the good’, to think rationally about ends, and that they possess certain basic physical needs. Rawls describes this as decision-making behind a veil of ignorance.

Rawls thinks rational contractors constrained like this would choose a society in which each person would have ‘an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others’ ([1971](#): 52).

He also thinks there would be a form of equality of outcome as well as opportunity. This he refers to as the *difference principle*, where

‘inequality is unjust except insofar as it is a necessary means to improving the position of the worst-off members of society’ (1971: 52). In other words, some inequalities are acceptable, but only if they increase the absolute position of the poorest.

For the international realm, a second contracting session takes place between the representatives of peoples. The conclusion of this round is a contract that resembles the traditional rules of [international society](#): [self-determination](#), [just war](#), mutual recognition and non-intervention – in other words, rules of coexistence, not justice (1971).

One response to this recognition is that it is the *content* or nature of that interdependence that requires justice. In this view, the current order is unjust and needs to be made just. According to Pogge (1994: 97), the wealthiest states in the world have imposed an economic order that disadvantages the poorest. In that context, he argues, we do have duties not to harm, or not to impose unjust institutions upon others:

There is an injustice in the economic scheme, which it would be wrong for more affluent participants to perpetuate. And that is so quite independently of whether we and the starving are united by a communal bond or committed to sharing resources with one another.

In other words, regardless of the lack of a common culture or ‘global society’, there are relationships of dominance, dependence and inequality that it is unjust to perpetuate. Even if we disagree upon what a just world order would look like, we can agree that the present international order is unjust, and that there is a responsibility to make it more just. Whether this requires a globally egalitarian world order or merely one that provides a ‘sufficient’ or minimal level – a global

basic standard below which no one should be allowed to fall – is now the focus of debate. Nevertheless, the main point is that we have duties to others, regardless of whether we are engaged in an activity of mutual advantage: these are general negative duties not to impose harms and to redress the harms we have inflicted.

This leads to a final and related point in favour of cross-border obligations and global justice. According to cosmopolitans, most versions of social contract theory never ask about the effects – positive or negative – of the contract on those outside it (see [Box 8.4](#)). As Henry Shue ([1983](#): 603) argues:

It is impossible to settle the magnitude of one's duties in justice (if any) toward the fellow members of one's [nation](#)-state – or whatever one's domestic society is – prior to and independent of settling the magnitude of one's duties in justice (if any) toward non-members.

#### **Box 8.4:** Discussion points

##### **Pogge on how societies impact on outsiders**

In assessing the institutional structure of a society by looking merely at how it affects its members we fail to come to terms with how our society affects the lives of foreigners (and how our lives are affected by how other societies are organised) – we disregard the (negative) externalities a national social contract may impose upon those who are not parties to it.

(Pogge [1989](#): 256)

For instance, we can imagine a principle of domestic justice that operates only at the cost of a deeply exploitative relationship with another society. If this relationship is a necessary one for the realisation of justice in the first state, then from a cosmopolitan position the contract is not just. Alternatively, we could argue that if domestic justice requires the exporting of environmental hazards or is reliant upon a steady stream of raw materials from another country, subsequently denying the members of that country a measure of domestic justice, then the domestic contract is unjust from a global perspective.

This argument is very similar to, and draws upon the same premises as, the Kantian position of Andrew Linklater and Jürgen Habermas. These authors argue that the international order, a world divided into separate [sovereign states](#), cannot be considered just because it does not rest upon the consent of all those affected by it. This goes both for the institutions of the sovereign state and the institutions of global governance such as the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#). To be just, any social arrangement must be consented to by all those affected, including those formally excluded from or outside it.

## **What is a just global order?**

In addition to defending moral universalism, theorists of global justice also offer models of what a just, or *more* just, world order might look like, and suggestions as to how foreign policy can incorporate cosmopolitan principles. As already noted, a common argument is that everybody affected by an action, institution or norm should be able to consent to or participate in its construction. It follows that all political institutions, and the [norms](#) that govern them, ought to be at least minimally just: they must take into account the interests of everybody affected

by them. This in turn means that there is an obligation upon states and citizens to develop globally, and not just nationally, just institutions.

### **Egalitarian justice**

As noted for global egalitarians, the requirement to develop global institutions is met by the account of justice developed by John Rawls, and the most influential approaches to global justice have, until very recently, been applications of Rawls' theory of justice (see [Box 8.1](#)). For Beitz, and Moellendorf, Rawls' substantive account of justice, as well as his mechanism for arriving at it, can provide the criteria for justice globally.

Because justice is universal, the 'difference principle' must apply globally to individuals and not states. Justice involves 'a just and stable institutional scheme preserving a distribution of basic rights, opportunities and ... goods that is fair both globally and within each nation' (Pogge [1989](#): 256). This conclusion is reached by arguing that we must begin with a cosmopolitan original position, not just a national one. There is no need for a second contract between the representatives of peoples because the original one necessarily will be universally inclusive. The basic structure of international relations should be governed, not by interstate principles, but by cosmopolitan principles that address the inequalities between individuals rather than states. What ultimately matters is how poor or badly off you are *in the world*, and not just in your own country. While Beitz, Pogge and Moellendorf have some differences over the exact mechanisms for addressing inequalities, they nonetheless agree that the rules must meet goals of the difference principle to improve the conditions of the least well-off members of the human race: 'The terms of international cooperation ... should ... be designed so that the social inequalities they allow to arise from natural contingencies ... tend to optimise the worst representative

individual share' (Pogge [1989](#): 250). In other words, the structure of international trade and economic interdependence should ensure that, despite an unequal distribution of material resources worldwide, no one should be unable to meet their basic requirements, nor should they suffer disproportionately from the lack of material resources. To this Pogge adds that the rules of the current system actively damage or disadvantage certain sectors of the economy, thus directly contradicting Rawlsian principles of justice. He argues that

the citizens and governments of the wealthy societies, by imposing the present global economic order, significantly contribute to the persistence of severe poverty and thus share institutional moral responsibility for it (Pogge [2002](#): 57).

Therefore, those of us who gain most from the current order have an obligation to change it in such a way that the most needy benefit.

### **Global ethics**

#### **Peter Singer**

Primates typically live in small groups – not more than a couple of hundred animals. They all know each other as individuals, and the attitudes they have to members of their own group are different from the attitudes they have to strangers. Human beings are primates, and for most of our evolutionary history, after we separated from other primate species, we also lived in face-to-face societies, typically numbering around 100 or 150 individuals. Since our ethical beliefs, and the emotional attitudes that support them, are influenced by our evolved nature, it is not surprising that we have developed ethical views that are generally well suited to living in such small groups.

During the last ten thousand years, in some parts of the world, humans began to form into larger communities – city-states, and then nations. They reflected about how they ought to live, and to write down their thoughts on ethical questions. The idea that ethics transcends our own small group, and even our nation, began to emerge with the first written philosophical traditions. In the fifth century BCE, the Chinese philosopher Mozi, appalled at the damage caused by war, said that we should, out of love and also for our mutual benefit, regard other people's countries as if they were our own. Similarly, the ancient Greek iconoclast Diogenes, when asked what country he was from, is said to have replied, 'I am a citizen of the world.' Nevertheless, it was only in the twentieth century that we could really begin to speak in practical terms of the possibility of a truly global ethics. Until then, we had neither the capacity nor the knowledge to deal with global ethical issues.

Consider some of the distinctively global ethical issues we face today:

- More than 700 million people live on less than the purchasing power equivalent of US\$1.90 per day, while another billion have so much wealth that, without a moment's thought, they spend a similar amount on a bottle of water – despite having easy access to safe tap water at no cost.
- Although international law recognises that gross and widespread violations of human rights can amount to a 'crime against humanity', there is still no international regime that can effectively exercise sufficient force to prevent people committing such crimes, and to ensure that those who do commit crimes against humanity are prosecuted before an international court.

- Some countries possess nuclear armaments powerful enough to kill tens of millions of people. If enough of these weapons were to be used, they would release radioactivity that would kill most living things on our planet – human beings included.
- By using fossil fuels, and raising unprecedented numbers of ruminant animals – mostly cattle – we are changing the climate of our planet. The year 2015 was the warmest since global weather records began to be kept in 1880, and extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, blizzards, storms, floods and droughts, are increasing. Sea levels are also rising as ice melts. Yet the quantity of greenhouse gases emitted continues to rise.

The difference between rich and poor has existed for a long time, and so has the question of the moral obligations of the rich to aid the poor, but until recently the rich could only aid the poor in their own community, or close to it. The problem became a global issue only in the twentieth century, when the development of instant communications and rapid transport made it possible for the wealthy in developed nations to know of a famine in another country while it was still happening, and to do something effective about it. Moreover, even though there have always been some people so poor that they die from poverty-related causes, never before have there been so many people living in such abundance that they could give away a significant part of their wealth and still be able to meet their basic needs, provide for their children's future and have a considerable degree of comfort as well. That gives an ancient issue a new sharpness.

The idea of global justice is also not really new, for the thought that a cruel tyrant deserves to be punished for their crimes is an inescapable

extrapolation from the sense of justice that almost all human societies possess. But the acceptance by the United Nations of a 'Responsibility to Protect' and the creation of an International Criminal Court are important new developments in international law that also have consequences for global ethics.

The danger that nuclear weapons could wipe out our species did not even exist until the nuclear arms race began in the decades after 1945, when the first atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the ability to make nuclear weapons spread beyond the United States. The science showing that emitting carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases is changing the planet's climate was not sufficiently developed to be given much weight until the 1960s. Thus these are completely new global issues that have no real precedent.

All four of these ethical issues are critical for our future. The problem is that, as I mentioned at the beginning of this postcard, we have not evolved to see them as critical ethical issues. We have evolved to be concerned about our kin and others close to us, not about strangers we cannot even see face to face. Hence we continue to spend money on things we don't need and that don't even really add to our happiness when we could use that money to save the lives of children who otherwise will die from easily preventable or treatable diseases, like diarrhoea, measles and malaria.

The difficulty is even greater when we turn to climate change because, unlike poverty, there is no near analogue in our more local experience of the wrong we are doing on a global scale. We struggle to see that emitting more greenhouse gases than we need is an ethical issue. It just doesn't feel like one to us, because for all of our evolutionary history there has never been a problem about greenhouse gas emissions. Yet

climate change is the greatest ethical challenge of our generation. By any defensible ethical standard, the industrialised nations – the ones responsible for creating the problem – are continuing to use several times their fair share of the capacity of the atmosphere to safely absorb our waste gases. Unless there is an immediate and dramatic drop in greenhouse gas emissions, hundreds of millions of people are likely to become refugees or to die because of extreme droughts and floods, rising sea levels and the spread of tropical diseases.

Since, like it or not, effective power currently rests at the level of countries, rather than some global body like the United Nations, all the world's countries need to agree on ethical standards that guide them regarding the quantity of greenhouse gases they can emit. It is hard to see how there could be an ethical solution to this problem that will not involve significant increases in the cost of producing energy in the developed nations, and also eventually in other large countries like China, India and Brazil. It may also require a change in diet – especially the consumption of less beef. That is why climate change is a unique test of the ability of our species to come together and solve a completely new global ethical problem.

## **Global justice in practice**

From this account of the nature of justice, a number of things follow for the practical realm of foreign policy and global governance. First and foremost, given its inequalities, there is a duty to reform the existing rules of international order. The current rules of international trade discriminate against the poor by

subsidising the rich and blocking access to imports from the poorest countries. Global justice demands that rich countries should open their markets to the poorer countries. Pogge ([2002](#)) also argues that they can do so without causing disproportionate harm to the rich. Such reforms are no longer a matter for individual states, but must take place in global forums such as the WTO. Rawlsians agree that a duty exists to create a just international order that does not systematically disadvantage or harm anyone – especially the poorest people. This is a duty both of international society collectively and of individual states: to change their practices and the multilateral agreements to which they are a party (see [Box 8.5](#)).

**Box 8.5:** Discussion points

**States as ‘good international citizens’**

All states, including middle-sized and small powers like Australia or Canada, have significant capacities to influence global policies along cosmopolitan lines. They have the opportunity to act, in Hedley Bull’s words, as ‘local agents of the world common good’ or as ‘good international citizens’. Peter Singer and Tom Gregg ([2004](#): 80) argue that a good global citizen ‘seeks global solutions for global problems ... [and] will not bargain too hard in order to extract the maximum benefit for its own citizens’. They maintain that such states can effect change in five key areas of [foreign aid](#), UN cooperation, trade, global environment, asylum seekers and [refugees](#). In recent years, the standing of many states as good international citizens has diminished due to a decline in [multilateralism](#).

## Cosmopolitan democracy

While few cosmopolitans would dispute the account given above, for many the reforms suggested by Pogge and others do not go far enough. In particular, insofar as they leave state sovereignty in place, they remain constitutionally unjust. Instead, cosmopolitans such as Daniele Archibugi ([2004](#)), David Held ([1995](#), [1997](#)), Luis Cabrera ([2004](#)) and Andrew Linklater ([1998](#)) argue that reforming the practices of states and international institutions is only the beginning of the necessary cosmopolitan transformation. Taking their lead from Kant and German critical theorist Jürgen Habermas (see [Chapter 4](#)), they argue that the categorical imperative requires a full democratisation of the international realm, as well as the implementation of distributive justice.

Cosmopolitan democrats tend to be social contract theorists of a different sort to Rawlsians. They begin by arguing that we cannot simply or fairly imagine what [idealised](#) agents might choose in the way that Rawls claims. Human beings are too diverse for any theorist to be able to anticipate what they might agree to. In addition, the Rawlsian solution is vulnerable to the criticism that it is insensitive to cultural differences in varieties of justice because it imposes a liberal view on others.

Instead of beginning with a hypothetical social experiment, cosmopolitan democrats argue that, in order to be legitimate, the principles of global justice ought to be derived from a real dialogue between real people. They argue that the idea that people should be able to consent to actions that affect them should be taken literally. This principle has been embodied in democratic societies in the form of representative elections and institutional accountability. The same practices should also apply in the international realm. They argue that there is a duty to create institutional structures that allow participation in decision-making on matters that affect everybody, such as rules of global trade and finance. What

is needed to make the international order both more just and more legitimate is the democratisation of its core institutions and practices. International institutions such as the United Nations, the WTO and the [World Bank](#), as well as regional institutions, ought to be made representative of people and not just states. This would involve forms of direct representation and election and the creation of a third directly elected chamber in the United Nations (Held [1997](#)).

The advantage of this approach to global justice is that it is a means for preventing the imposition of a single distributive scheme on anyone. The principles of distributive justice would not be worked out by politicians or philosophers alone, and then imposed on the world; rather, they would, at the very least, have to be consented to by the directly elected representatives of all the world's people. In addition, a degree of redistribution would be necessary to enable effective participation in any such assemblies. To participate in democratic practices requires that one not only be physically capable, but also able to access relevant knowledge and information. Therefore, cosmopolitan democracy requires global justice even as it seeks to legitimise the decision-making process.

It is important to note that it is not being argued that global justice requires either a world state or the destruction or homogenisation of other cultures. The main argument is that when people are affected by a rule or a practice of an institution (or other actors), they ought to be able to participate in the decision-making process or have direct representation in the bodies most involved.

### **An Asian conception of global justice?**

**Baogang He**

Theories of justice in international relations are often criticised for being so heavily reliant on Western philosophy. But notions of justice are not the exclusive preserve of the West. Understanding how justice has been conceived outside the West is important in the study of international relations. The discussion here will outline some of the distinctive ways in which justice is conceived in Asia.

Asian justice arguments object to Western discourses on global justice for three main reasons. First, Western theories of global justice tend to base their arguments on essentially liberal notions of justice, which derive from Western domestic political contexts. While extremely valuable, the liberal approach to global justice frequently is imbued – either implicitly or explicitly – with inherent problems such as cultural superiority, and a lack of sensitivity to other conceptions of justice.

Second, for the discourse on justice to become truly global, it must move away from a predominantly Western-centric approach, or at least supplement it with non-Western understandings of justice, especially the views of those in the under-developed world. A truly just global order must acknowledge the perspectives of the least advantaged groups in the developing world and also be accepted by them.

Finally, Asian concerns with global justice are related primarily to concrete public goods rather than abstract liberal principles of rights and liberties. Some of the justice concerns expressed by Asian societies include: getting stolen heritage goods back from former imperial states, getting freely traded cultural goods back (this implies limits to free trade), getting corrupt officials and their stolen money back (this implies restrictions on the free movement of people) and getting professionals such as doctors and nurses back from advanced countries (again, this implies a limit to the free movement of people). Each of these themes

will be discussed in the next section, but first I provide a brief outline of the goods-based conception of justice that underpins these concerns.

### ***A goods-based conception of international justice***

When compared with Western theories of global justice, the Asian goods-based notion of global justice has the following distinctive characteristics. First, the starting point of Asian concerns with international justice is the historical injustice of Western imperialism, and the redistribution of certain goods in favour of the undeveloped countries that suffered under Western imperialism in the past. It does not start with a grand theory of global justice; instead, it is a living theory with direct public policy implications.

Second, the Asian goods-based notion of justice is against pure, unlimited freedom, but stresses state regulation of public goods to defend national sovereignty. Rather than dismissing nation-states as occupying no moral weight in cosmopolitan ethics, Asians often accept nation-states as important defenders of their justice claims in world politics. From this perspective, national goods and state sovereignty are foundations for international justice; international justice deals with the just relationship between nation-states with regard to national goods and interests.

### ***Stolen antiquities***

There is concern in Asia over historical injustices whereby Western imperial powers took cultural goods from the weak countries by force. The number of pieces in question is under dispute. A UNESCO study indicates that approximately 1.67 million Chinese heritage relics are currently displayed in over 200 museums in 47 countries around the

world (Meyer [2015](#)). Chinese media reports indicate that there are actually 17 million Chinese cultural relics worldwide (Davis [2014](#)).

Stakeholders concerned with global justice argue that stolen, looted or plundered antiquities should be returned to their rightful owner rather than unfairly kept in museums. This is restorative justice. When UK Prime Minister David Cameron established a microblogging site on Sina Weibo, 260 000 individuals signed up with the repeated question, ‘When will Britain return its illegally plundered artefacts?’ a message that was first posted by the China Centre for International Economic Exchanges led by Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan (Davis [2014](#)). Greece, Turkey and China have also tried to get their inheritances back through UNESCO, and through law suits against various states, but with little success (Richardson [2012](#)); although Australia returned a stolen Guanyin statue back to China according to bilateral agreements on 5 March 2015 (Xinhua [2015](#)).

Both governmental and non-governmental organisations have been involved in cultural heritage recovery work. The International Council of Museums (ICOM), for example, helps member countries to tap into their seminars, training programs, workshops and other resources for capacity-building (Galla 2001).

### ***Fugitive justice***

One common global phenomenon is that corrupt officials from poor countries in Africa and Asia have purchased luxury properties in London, Paris, New York and other major cosmopolitan cities. While these cities benefit from purchases made with stolen public money, it is unfair to the people of poor countries. The underlying moral concern is not with protecting global free movement or free investment, but rather

with punishing illegal and corrupt officials who misuse public funds for their private gains. This raises the ethical question of how and why Western countries can provide such a safe place for corrupt officials. Justice here is not understood as a guarantee of liberal ‘freedom’, but rather as a fair result for poor people in corrupt countries. Stolen public funds should be returned to their countries of origin.

In 2000, China and most ASEAN countries signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. This offers a regional legal framework in the fight against the repatriation of corrupt officials. On 31 October 2003, the UN General Assembly approved the UN Anticorruption Convention, the first UN legal document to provide guidelines against corruption. The Convention helps developing countries to bring fugitives back for punishment. China joined the UN Anticorruption Convention on 10 December 2003 and brought back 596 fugitive corrupt officials from abroad in the same year. However, the United States, Canada and Britain have not yet ratified the convention. According to Huang Feng, inspector at the Department of Judicial Assistance and Foreign Affairs of the Ministry of Justice of China, ‘the agreement is a sort of failure in this respect’ (Ding [2006](#): 14–17).

### ***Skilled workers***

The Millbank Memorial Fund Report by Paula O’Brien and Lawrence Gostin ([2011](#)) finds that the global shortage of health workers, nurses and doctors has created health issues in Southeast Asia and other developing regions of the world. The Philippines, for example, has suffered from a loss of skilled workers such as doctors and nurses, who have rejected poorly paid jobs at home and been lured to Australia, the United States and Canada. Some eight million Filipinos, or about 10 per

cent of the population, work abroad. Doris Ho, the President of the Magsaysay shipping conglomerate, raised this as a 'fairness' issue in an APEC business meeting, saying:

When you offer people permanent immigration, it is not a level playing field for labor mobility. It puts the sender country at a disadvantage and leads to brain drain. Receiver countries should be sensitive because sender countries spend all their money educating their teachers, doctors and nurses (Symons [2007](#): 29).

Some African states have faced the same issue as the Philippines, and have successfully pressured the World Health Organization (WHO) to develop the WHO Global Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel Code. However, the Code is largely voluntary in nature. It lacks designated authorities, and has a poor level of preparedness, weak mobilisation of stakeholders and low involvement of civil society (Dambisya et al. [2015](#)).

### ***The politics of an Asian approach to global justice***

While Asian conceptions of justice have much to commend them, they may also be used by political leaders to deny other legitimate justice claims. For instance, the emphasis on local perspectives can be used to deny global standards, as was the case where the former Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir argued for a more just distribution of global resources while simultaneously playing down the importance of human rights. The problem here is that justice claims over resources cannot be valid if human rights principles are violated severely. Put another way, global claims for justice lose their moral appeal if there is injustice at the domestic level.

This is an issue too with some of the Asian criticism of Western imperialism, which can also be an excuse for the failings of domestic governments. For example in discussing migrant worker issues, Ryan Urbano ([2012](#)), a Philippine scholar, argues that it is the underlying rules of the present global order that have led to the poverty in the Philippines. It is debatable, of course, what role Western colonisation plays in contributing to poverty or prosperity, but it is certain that local actors and national governments have important roles to play in this context. A comparison between Singapore and Sri Lanka offers insight in this regard. Both were British colonies, but while the former used English as its official language after independence, helping enhance racial harmony and cooperation, the latter abandoned English after independence and descended into a long process of ethnic conflict. The point is that when one makes a global justice claim of the kind made by Urbano and others, one should also take local structures and practices into account.

## Conclusion

Theorists of global justice begin with the assumption that justice, understood broadly, is the first virtue of social institutions. In other words, the very purpose of the state or political community is to provide justice for its members. Cosmopolitanism also begins with the argument that the equality of the human species requires universal principles of justice. This argument is buttressed by the profound degree to which international institutions such as the WTO now affect people across the world. Interdependence and [globalisation](#) mean that even ‘national’ justice is partly dependent upon global factors. Under these

circumstances, justice necessarily requires global solutions, including the democratising of the international realm.

## Discussion questions

**8.1** Why do Rawlsian cosmopolitans criticise Rawls' solution to global justice?

**8.2** What is justice and should it be global?

**8.3** Should the global order be more democratic?

**8.4** Should democracy be cosmopolitan?

**8.5** What are the arguments in favour of cosmopolitan reconstruction of international relations? What are the arguments against it?

## *Further reading*

Beitz, Charles 1979, *Political theory and international relations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *A profoundly influential early attempt to apply Rawls' insights to international relations.*

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Linklater, Andrew 1998, *The transformation of political community: Ethical foundations of the post-Westphalian era*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *An important attempt to outline a cosmopolitan theory of international relations.*

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Pogge, Thomas 2002, *World poverty and human rights: Cosmopolitan responsibilities and reforms*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *An impressive, empirically informed philosophical account of universal obligations to alleviate poverty.*

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Shapcott, Richard 2010, *International ethics: A critical introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *An introduction to a range of ethical issues in IR.*

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Singer, Peter 2002, *One world: The ethics of globalisation*, Melbourne: Text. *The world's leading utilitarian philosopher examines some of the ethical implications of globalisation.*

## Part 2



# International history

**9** [From the Great War to World War II](#)

*Louise Fawcett*

**10** [The Cold War and after](#)

*Nick Bisley*

# From the Great War to World War II



**Louise Fawcett**

[Introduction](#)

[International history and the study of International Relations](#)

[After World War I: The Paris Peace Conference](#)

[The League of Nations](#)

[The Soviet Union in International Relations](#)

[The United States and international order](#)

[The Great Depression](#)

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[Hitler's world](#)

[Appeasement and the path to war](#)

[Conclusion: Reflections on the 'great' inter-war era](#)

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## **Introduction**

This chapter offers an historical grounding in [inter-war](#) international relations. It tracks and analyses the progress of international relations in the period between World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1939–45), both of which are rightly seen as two major and formative conflicts in international history – and indeed for the study of International Relations (IR). It is sometimes assumed that the two World Wars were primarily European affairs, at least in their origins, and reflected the persistence of European predominance in a fast-changing world. Yet these were truly global and globalising wars, as reflected in their causes, courses and consequences, the technologies they employed and the ideas they helped to generate. This period foreshadowed European decline, witnessing the rise of the United States, the challenge of the Soviet Union, of the Far East and, more gradually, of peoples around the world subject to imperial rule. It saw the establishment of new borders for parts of Europe and the region that became the Middle East, giving rise to regional conflicts that persist today. It also saw the emergence of new international organisations, notably the League of Nations, the forefather of the United Nations, which sought to regulate the relations between states in novel ways. In short, the inter-war period provided the foundations for the international system that developed over the following decades. Many of its contours are still visible today.

## **International history and the study of International Relations**

While offering an overview of some of the most important developments and events of the period between the wars (see [Box 9.1](#)), the chapter is also informed by the major IR theories and approaches introduced elsewhere in this volume. It demonstrates how the study of IR theory requires a parallel understanding of

international history. Although it might seem obvious to state that good IR requires a good understanding of history, international history is not seen by all today as an essential accompaniment to the study of IR. Indeed, it has increasingly been neglected by the search for more parsimonious theoretical explanations and the use of new social science research methods, which sideline history or use historical evidence selectively (Schroeder [1997](#)).

**Box 9.1: Key dates**  
**Major events, 1910–45**

1910	Norman Angell's 'The Great Illusion'
1914	World War I begins
1917	The United States enters World War I; Russian Revolution
1918	World War I ends
1919	Paris Peace Conference
1920	League of Nations
1922	Washington Conference
1925	Locarno Treaties
1928	Kellogg–Briand Pact
1929	Great Depression
1931	Manchurian crisis
1932	Disarmament Conference; Chaco War
1933	World Economic Conference; Hitler becomes German chancellor
1935	Abyssinian crisis
1936	Spanish Civil War; Hitler reoccupies the Rhineland; Rome–Berlin axis
1937	Japan invades China
1938	Austrian Anschluss
	Munich Agreement

1939	Polish crisis, start of World War II
	Nazi–Soviet Pact
	E.H. Carr's <i>Twenty Years' Crisis</i> published
1941	Germany invades the Soviet Union
	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor
1945	European war ends; WMD use ends Japanese war

There are at least three important reasons for taking international history seriously. First, as the Italian philosopher and historian Benedetto Croce famously put it, ‘All history is contemporary history’ (Conati [2015](#)). The past offers an open window on the present. The second is that history allows us both to build, illustrate and test theory – not just through looking at individual cases, but by showing how relations between states travel over time. The power of realism as a theory of IR is not merely that it can help explain a particular international episode, but that it provides a good general guide to understanding the development of interstate relations over time. Third, the growth of IR as a discipline progressed alongside and closely mirrored the major events of the twentieth century (see [Introduction](#)). While obviously drawing on a much longer timeframe and a set of thinkers from different disciplines predating the twentieth century, modern IR theories were designed and developed alongside the events and facts they sought to explain (Hollis and Smith [1990](#): 16–44). Both [liberalism](#) and [realism](#) drew heavily on the events of the inter-war period. Liberalism, also referred to as ‘idealism’ (for reasons that will become apparent) developed partly as a response to the extremes of World War I (1914–18) which, when viewed retrospectively, provides an excellent example of realism at work.

Often understood as an attempt to balance the power of a rising Germany following its unification in 1871, World War I underscored the point that realists have made insistently: that the international system is anarchic and states will form alliances and seek to balance themselves against strong emerging powers. Yet, following World War I, and in response to its highly destructive effects, a body of thought emerged among early IR scholars that rejected the inevitability of war and proposed that liberal and pacific values, enshrined in domestic and international institutions, could facilitate cooperation between states. The League of Nations founded in 1920 was one institutional manifestation of such thinking; another, more declaratory in nature, was the Kellogg–Briand Pact, signed in 1928.

Early IR scholars, like E.H. Carr ([1946](#)), in his influential work on the inter-war period, became increasingly sceptical about such [utopian](#) thinking. True, [idealism](#) had informed public opinion and government policy, but it created only a dangerous ‘illusion of peace’ (Marks [1976](#)), arguably facilitating rather than impeding the possibility of another war. If the 1920s saw some positive developments in respect of international cooperation and institutions there were many worrying signs reflected in the absence of robust mechanisms of economic and security regulation and the rise of extreme nationalism and militarism, which in the uncertain climate of the 1930s facilitated a slide back to war.

In such a climate, realism – a theory focused on the pursuit of national interests and material capabilities of states, a riposte to the wishful thinking of liberalism – triumphed in the atmosphere of a new destructive world war closely followed by the onset of the Cold War. Yet, despite its explanatory power, even the resilience of realism was soon challenged in the face of new interdependencies between states, the power of transnational actors and the renewed vigour of international organisations in the Cold War and beyond (Nye

and Keohane 1977) (see [Chapter 10](#)). In other words, the history of the period shows how theory and practice are engaged in constant dialogue.

Beyond the key theoretical divides noted above and their evident relevance to this period, another preliminary observation may be made – one that touches on wider theoretical developments in IR well beyond the era of the two World Wars. This point, belonging to the realm of [critical theory](#), relates to the sources of knowledge and scholarship – where ideas come from, which audiences they address and in which languages they are written down (see [Chapter 1](#)). It is evident in this period, and to some extent also in the contemporary world, that the view of the world obtained via the ‘West’ – particularly the English-speaking world – has tended to predominate among scholars and policymakers. In speaking of international order, institutions and powers, the starting point is frequently that order as seen from capitals like London, Washington or Paris, or institutions designed by powers like the United Kingdom or United States, and power as largely lying within these geographical zones.

This is certainly true when one considers the inter-war world. In that world, and in studies of the war itself, there has been a general neglect of the non-West – or at least of the non-West as an active agent in the shaping of IR. In his preface to E.H. Carr’s seminal work, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, Michael Cox quotes Carr as asking: ‘What is this thing called IR in the “English speaking countries” other than the “study” about how “to run the world from positions of strength”?’ (Carr [2016](#): xxiix). This point may be illustrated in various ways by referring both to the dominant IR literature and to the simple reporting of facts and events. For example, the deaths of Ottoman soldiers in World War I (estimates place these at 700 000) are far less frequently reported upon than the deaths of European or US soldiers (Rogan [2015](#)); so is Japan’s and China’s sense of unequal treatment in international relations and institutions after the war. Similarly, students of IR are mostly unaware that one of Latin America’s

most deadly wars – the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay, took place between 1932 and 1935, with the loss of at least 100 000 lives.

Reading history backwards with an eye sensitive to the world of the early twenty-first century, it becomes clear that we cannot simply take this assumption of Western dominance for granted, but must start to think of the inter-war period in much more global terms. It becomes a moment, like many other moments, in the waxing and waning of multiple powers and different international systems (Kennedy [1987](#)). In the remainder of the chapter, the inter-war story is told with the above points in mind by focusing on key themes and events, and the debates surrounding them, while weaving in parts of the theoretical background as described above.

## **After World War I: The Paris Peace Conference**

World War I was also called the ‘Great War’ owing to its duration, scope, technological advances and the number of casualties inflicted. Over ten million soldiers died. Although it was a war started by European powers and mostly fought on their territory, it ultimately drew in large parts of the world – colonial armies were recruited to fight and colonial territories became spoils of war. Allies like Japan provided naval support to counter German influence in the Pacific, and the United States finally entered the war in 1917 after German attacks on its shipping in the North Atlantic and the conviction of US President Wilson that the United States had a duty to assist the entente powers and impose conditions for a just peace. For some, ‘great’ therefore had a moral connotation, for it was seen as a war that pitted the forces of reaction against those of progress. Nationalism and militarism were the enemies against which peace-loving democracies must guard. Yet, despite the war’s length and its devastating

effects on soldiers and civilian populations alike, it failed to protect against either. The ‘Great War’ was not followed by a ‘Great Peace’ – indeed, the nationalist and militarist surge of the 1930s was in part a response to the perceived unfairness and incompleteness of the post-war treaties that rewarded the victors (though not always equally) and punished the vanquished in ways that provoked resentment and revisionism. The return of war in 1939, though, thus also directly linked to aspects of the settlement itself.

The Paris Peace Conference was important not only as a source of post-war treaties, but also because of its location and key participants. Paris briefly became the ‘capital of the world’ (Macmillan [2001](#): 1), and notwithstanding the presence of US President Wilson, Europeans dominated the proceedings, meaning that Europe’s pre-eminence, in peace as in war, was secure – at least for the time being (Marks [1976](#): 26). In terms of outcomes, not all of which were finally determined at Paris, despite the use of the term ‘Versailles Settlement’, many of the details of the post-war treaties – for example, relating to the Middle East – were worked out at subsequent conferences and different locations. Three stand out: first, the new territorial arrangements in Europe and the Middle East following the break-up of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, implying major border redrawing and population movement; second, the German settlement, involving territorial losses for Germany, the acceptance of German responsibility for the war in the so-called ‘war guilt’ clause, and the related payment of reparations to the victorious powers – notably France – for damage suffered in the war; and third, the construction of an international organisation, the League of Nations, tasked with keeping the peace.

The territorial settlement worked for some, but not all, parts of Europe and the Middle East. President Wilson’s commitment to the application of national self-determination did not finally settle borders in East and Central Europe as subsequent events revealed; it was not applied at all in the Middle East – with

consequences that remain apparent today. The German settlement has been described both as too hard and too soft – neither adequately punishing Germany so as to prevent her from becoming strong again, nor accommodating her sufficiently into international society to avoid future aggressive tendencies. Herein lay a lesson for future peacemakers and provided grounds for the policies of appeasement that followed in the 1930s. The reparations clauses were seen as unfair and punitive by Germans and were hotly contested, with the prominent British economist J.M. Keynes predicting dire consequences for the future of Europe should they be imposed. Under the subsequent US-brokered Dawes and Young Plans, these payments were gradually adjusted and unravelled over the next decade or so, but the damage was arguably already done. The territorial losses – some 27 000 square miles (almost seven million hectares) – were deeply resented and linked to the aggressively revisionist turn of Nazi foreign policy in the 1930s; demilitarisation of the Rhineland, crucial to the development of Germany's military-industrial complex, proved to be only temporary and was reversed in the 1930s.



**Figure 9.1** The Versailles Settlement

So the Versailles Settlement, with its pomp and ceremony and its noble aspirations and ideals, failed to deliver the promised ‘new world order’, to borrow a phrase from the post-Cold War world of President George Bush Snr. It was, in part, a ‘victor’s peace’, for its privileging of the main wartime allies: US President Wilson achieved a number of his goals for improving international relations; Britain and France were able to extend their control of overseas possessions, notably in the Middle East; but France never felt secure and soon turned to building new alliances and security guarantees, of which the Locarno treaties are an important example. Other allies, like Italy, Japan, China and the Arabs who had fought Ottoman armies alongside the British, felt thwarted in their aspirations and sought means to improve their situation independent of the settlement. Italy, for example, soon made claims against both Yugoslavia and Greece. More resentful still was the main defeated power, Germany. Its policymakers, from the more moderate politicians of the Weimar Republic to Hitler’s Nazis of the Third Reich, sought in different ways to overturn the treaty in the coming years.

## **The League of Nations**

The creation of a League of Nations was an integral part of the Versailles Settlement, reflecting the aspirations of key peacemakers, including Britain, France and the United States. While the creation of the League was the first of President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, the idea of a league of nations had a longer history dating back to Immanuel Kant’s ([1795](#)) late eighteenth-century work *Perpetual Peace*; its legacy, despite a reputation for failure, informed the development of international organisation for the century that followed. With

this in mind, any appraisal of the League needs to measure its achievements alongside its much-advertised failures.

Inaugurated in 1920, this was undoubtedly a first for international organisation. The League of Nations was a formal, permanent international organisation with a base, appropriately, in neutral Switzerland. It was what is called a 'multi-purpose' organisation, reflecting the diverse range of its activities, accelerating and formalising a trend towards multilateral diplomacy already visible in the nineteenth century. Given the timing and circumstances of its foundation, and the fact that a large part of its charter or Covenant was dedicated to providing mechanisms to secure peace, it is remembered mostly because of its failure to prevent war in the 1930s. It is not true to say, however, that it failed absolutely, since it was successful in other areas – public health, humanitarian action and labour legislation are just a few examples. It was also instrumental in arbitrating disputes, like that over the Aaland Islands in 1921, although these mostly involved minor powers (Finland and Sweden, in this case). However, it is true to state that the Covenant did not provide any mechanism to enforce peace. Its largest failures were therefore to prevent the major acts of aggression that occurred in the 1930s: the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, Italy's intervention in Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia), the remilitarisation of the Rhineland and the Austrian Anschluss – both explicitly prohibited by the terms of the Peace Treaties.

Despite its internationalist pretensions, the League was never universal in membership or reach, though importantly it did include some developing countries – Latin Americans, for example, were well represented. It also reflected the idea of a 'victor's peace', though not all victors were satisfied with its actions and policies. President Wilson had much to do with the drafting and content of the Covenant, but with the US Senate rejecting the Versailles Treaties, the United States never joined the League. There was a bigger issue with

membership, however: Germany did not join until 1926, then left in 1933 after Hitler became Chancellor; the Soviet Union only joined in 1934; Japan left in 1933; and Italy left in 1937. While the absence or exit of such important powers is telling, even a major power like France was an ambivalent supporter of the League's activities, seeking additional security guarantees beyond the League in multilateral treaties like those signed at Locarno in 1925. Although the League was not formally disbanded until 1946, by which time a bigger and better international institution – the [United Nations](#) – had been crafted in San Francisco, its failure was visible to all by the mid-1930s, with its relative inaction in major theatres of conflict – whether in Asia, Europe, Africa or Latin America.

Mazower's ([2012](#)) critical volume *Governing the World* makes the point that the League provided a means to reinforce the existing hierarchy in IR. For all the language of internationalism, this was a hierarchy predicated on Western dominance and one in which Southern voices were muted. Another view would be to see the League – albeit imperfectly – as attempting to introduce new principles and policies in a wide range of fields, which in the short and long run contributed to a rethinking of relations between peoples and states. The modern United Nations is testament to this.

### **Box 9.2: Case study**

#### **The Middle East**

The emergence of large parts of what is today called the Middle East (excluding North Africa) is directly attributable to the events of World War I and the subsequent peace treaties (see [Figure 9.2](#)), which have been called, ironically, 'a peace to end all peace' (Fromkin [2000](#)). The Ottoman Empire was broken up after its defeat in the war: the rump

state, Turkey became independent, as did the territory that would become Saudi Arabia, with Britain and France taking advantage of their superior position, and the absence of Russian competition following the revolution of 1917, to divide up its Arab territories. These territories were to become new states – Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Palestine/Israel – whose introduction to international society would be regulated through the mandate system administered by the League of Nations, where the mandatory powers would report annually to the League. However, this regulation – important in principle – did not extend to territorial division, or implementation of the principles of good government. If the former was mostly the result of often-conflicting wartime promises and treaties, the latter directly reflected the preferences of the colonial powers, which fashioned political arrangements and promoted groups and individuals likely to serve their interests. The effect was that sizeable parts of the modern Middle East saw new boundaries and systems of government that were ‘fabricated in Europe’ (Fromkin [2000](#): 1), and thus lacked local legitimacy. Even existing states – like Iran – that were not directly affected by the war and post-war treaties felt the pressures of Britain’s post-war influence in its political and economic life, with a British oil company, the Anglo-Persian, playing the dominant role in the exploitation of the country’s significant reserves. When Reza Shah, whose rise to power Britain had assisted in the 1920s, proved obstructive to Britain’s World War II plans to occupy the country and expel German nationals, he was forced to abdicate in 1941, replaced by his young, more pliable son, Mohammed Reza. The unequal and dependent relationship between Iran and Britain, and later the United States, was a contributing factor in the Iranian Revolution that ousted the Shah in 1979 and led to the establishment of an Islamic Republic.



**Figure 9.2** The Middle East in 1930

The inter-war period proved to be formative for the region in another way. The honouring of British promises to Zionists in the Balfour Declaration in respect of the creation of a ‘Jewish homeland’ in Palestine proved to be an important step on the road to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, provoking a cycle of tension and wars between Israel and the Arabs with consequences that remain to this day. British attempts to balance competing interests in Palestine in the inter-war period failed, as did early UN efforts to implement a two-state solution. The still-unresolved Palestine–Israel conflict – and numerous attempts by the international community to resolve it – is one obvious product of the post-war settlement; another more general and related difficulty was state-and nation-building in the former Ottoman domains. Even when states achieved formal independence after World War II, subsequent processes of nation-building were interrupted and incomplete, contributing to a cycle of regional rivalries and wars that invited external intervention, and mostly uninterrupted authoritarian rule. With some exceptions, this was only disrupted by the US-led intervention in one of the former British mandates, Iraq, in 2003, and then by the Arab Spring

uprisings that started late in 2010; their impact in the former French mandate of Syria was particularly profound. The rise of the movement called [Islamic State](#) (IS, or ISIS), feeding on regional disorder and the sectarian movements that were fostered in the region, may be linked the influence of the West and its allies in the Islamic world; indeed, in its propaganda, IS has repeatedly called for an overturning of the post-World War I borders established by the former colonial powers. So, nearly a century after the various treaties in respect of what became the Middle East were signed, the consequences of those treaties still reverberate throughout the region.

## **The Soviet Union in International Relations**

Just as the design of the modern Middle East and the roots of many of its contemporary conflicts were linked to the war and its outcome, so, in a different way, was the political future of what would become the Soviet Union – also known as the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, or USSR. The war helped to set in motion a revolutionary process that ultimately fatally undermined the already debilitated Tsarist autocracy and led to the establishment of the first communist state. The consequences of this were felt far beyond Russia and its immediate neighbourhood. Indeed, it may be argued that the onset of World War II and then the Cold War, which came to dominate the international political scene for over forty years, may be either partly or directly attributed to the changes brought about by the Russian Revolution. Faced with a choice between communism and fascism, many democratic states vacillated, providing sustenance to extreme right leaders like Hitler, Mussolini and Spain's Franco.

Had they chosen to support the Soviet Union or issue a more serious challenge to nationalist movements of the far right, international history could have taken a very different course.

One of the interesting and challenging aspects of the inter-war period from an IR perspective is how to interpret the emergence of a new kind of state in international society in the form of the Soviet Union (Armstrong, [1993](#)). The revolutionary ideas that surrounded the establishment of the Soviet Union, originating in Marxist thought, were not new, but the practical effects of the revolution in the Soviet Union were far reaching and would have profound consequences both during and beyond the inter-war period. First, the revolution in 1917 caused Russia to leave the war – which in itself impacted upon the conduct of the war and the post-war settlement. Second, the Soviet Union became an isolated state for much of this period, feared for its revolutionary contagion. It did not, for example, join the League of Nations, with Lenin famously calling it ‘an alliance of imperialist robbers’, although this policy was reversed in the 1930s.

Although its foreign policy instrument, the Comintern, was the source of anti-Western propaganda and activity, the Soviet Union was not a strong state during this period, nor was it successful in promoting revolutionary change beyond its borders. Its focus was rather on domestic development and regime consolidation: the collectivisation of agriculture, and fast industrialisation rather than revolutionary export. Stalin’s brutal purges – the Great Terror – decimated elites. Yet this was not just a domestic affair: other states’ foreign policies were conditioned by their perceptions of the Soviet Union as a revolutionary state, which made them mistrustful of cooperation. When the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in the 1930s, under Foreign Commissar Litvinov, and called for a collective response to the threat of fascism, there was little enthusiasm, informing the Soviet Union’s decision to form a Nazi–Soviet pact in 1939. The

‘Great Alliance’, comprising the United States, Soviet Union and Great Britain, only emerged after the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. Arguably, had the allies of World War II been willing to cooperate with Moscow prior to the war, German (and Italian and Japanese) power might have been restrained and war avoided altogether.

## **The United States and international order**

If the Soviet Union could be characterised as a weak state during the inter-war period, the United States was quite the reverse. Although its international stance is often described as isolationist, this belies the fact that, based on its economic and financial resources, the United States was already a powerful state before World War I, and in many respects had overtaken Britain as the economic capital of the world. Its overseas interests were fast expanding – manifest not only in Latin America, but also Asia. Its reluctance to enter World War I related not to a shortage of resources, but to a dislike of European entanglements – its power politics and empire-building – even though the United States was not averse to empire building in its own sphere of interest, notably Latin America. However, unlike other states, the United States could afford to be isolationist. With its huge and defensible landmass, multiple resources, growing economy and large population size, there was no immediate need for large-scale international involvement – or to search for new territories and resources.

President Wilson had promised US neutrality in World War I, and his position only changed as the European war developed in ways that directly challenged US interests – German attacks on US shipping being one example. With the US entry into the war, Wilson was determined to place his mark on IR. His vision for world order, expressed in the ‘Fourteen Points’, was visible in the

war in which he called for ‘peace without victory’ and in the negotiations that followed, even though a number of the Points remained unfulfilled and the US Senate ultimately rejected the Versailles Treaty that sought to implement them. Wilson’s legacy – a mix of internationalism undergirded by realism – nonetheless informed the US diplomatic tradition for the coming century (Ambrosius [1987](#)).

If the United States was restrained in its use of hard power in this period – although Latin American states subject to ‘gunboat diplomacy’ might disagree – US soft power grew exponentially, reflected in influence of US culture and institutions. Choosing not to initially involve itself directly in European political developments or in the League of Nations, it was nonetheless active in multilateral diplomacy – particularly in the area of disarmament. In the Washington Conference, which took place between 1921–22, the United States was instrumental in securing the Five Power Treaty, which placed limits on naval expansion in the Pacific. American bankers helped to renegotiate the terms of German reparations in the Dawes and Young Plans, easing the burden of repayments – although not German resentment at their imposition. In 1928, then US Secretary of State Frank Kellogg ratified, along with fourteen other signatories, the Kellogg–Briand Pact, a document renouncing war as an instrument of state policy. Reflecting its economic power (although also its lack of regulation), the United States was also active in what has been called ‘dollar diplomacy’, permitting its banks to loan large sums to finance European reconstruction – ultimately with disastrous consequences, as discussed below, when its stock market crashed leading to the Great Depression.

During the 1930s, the effects of the depression reinforced US isolationism. Despite the overtly expansionist acts of a number of powers, the official policy remained one of neutrality. But President Roosevelt, convinced of the seriousness of the German threat, worked to bring the US public around to a

more committed internationalist stance, one only finally achieved after the Japanese attack on the US Navy in Pearl Harbor in 1941. The entry of the United States into World War II, as was the case in World War I, proved decisive, and its outcome secured for the United States its position at the pinnacle of world power, thereby making it a major architect of the post-war order and the ‘Global Cold War’ (Westad [2005](#)) that followed. In its ‘rise to globalism’ (Ambrose [1997](#)), it is hard to under-estimate the impact – positive and negative – of the inter-war period on evolution of the United States as a ‘superpower’, a term that only came into use after the war.

## **The Great Depression**

The Great Depression, which followed the US stock market crash of 1929, also known as the ‘Wall Street Crash’, unleashed ten years of depression that contributed to the onset of World War II in multiple ways (Boyce [1989](#)). It was paradoxically both a reflection of US power and the absence of US leadership. When the crash occurred, it had global repercussions – such was the might of the US economy – but the United States was unwilling to assume the role of global hegemon or leader to ease the effects of the crisis, preferring to raise tariffs on imported goods and protect its domestic economy. The crash and subsequent depression deserve underlining for revealing the fragility of the inter-war system – the optimism of the 1920s was quickly reversed – and the interdependence of economics and politics in ways hitherto poorly understood. The particular conditions of the Great Depression, coming so soon after the end of a major war, acted to weaken infant institutions like the League, and collective attempts to right the global economy in the 1933 World Economic Conference failed. Conditions of autarky, with states turning in on themselves, exposed

contradictory moods of passivity and resistance. This was a climate in which strong populist leaders with ambitious revisionist goals – at home and abroad – could flourish. Alongside Germany and Italy, Japan was one such revisionist power.

## **Asia's rise**

The place of Asia in international relations between the wars has been understudied in comparison to the place of Europe and the United States. Yet the Asian theatre in both the world wars, and in the inter-war period, was a critical one, and those seeking to understand the origins of Japan's expansionist policies, China's civil war and the search for international status and recognition by both states should study this period carefully. Japan's economic and political rise was broadly supported by the Western powers; it was one of the victors of World War I, and treated as a great power at Versailles and at the Washington Conference that followed (Iriye [2013](#): 2), but its demands for equality were never fully satisfied and factions in Japan continued to question the benefits of joining the West's 'international society'. Resentment and revisionist attitudes grew as the impact of the Depression took hold, allowing militarist and nationalist tendencies to gain the upper hand. Japan's invasion of Manchuria, where it already had established economic interests, marked the beginning of a more aggressive expansionist policy in Asia, finally leading to war with China in 1937 (Beasley [1987](#): 175–6) and to war with the United States in 1941. Japan's refusal to surrender after the end of the European war led to the unprecedented decision to use the newly discovered atomic bomb, an early instance of the use of WMD with devastating consequences for Japan's population, and one that would deeply mark its future political development.

For the Chinese, the West's privileging of Japan and perceived neglect of Chinese national interests after World War I had similarly far-reaching consequences, helping to unleash the forces leading to civil war and eventually the victory of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949. The May Fourth Movement was sparked by Chinese anger at a clause favouring Japan in the Versailles Settlement. The subsequent Washington Treaties, intended to safeguard China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, nonetheless upheld an 'open door' policy to outside powers, adding to the sense that China had received unequal treatment (Best et al. [2015](#): 68–70). Although China started to receive Western support in the later 1930s and joined World War II as part of the alliance, its inter-war history and wartime experience (as described by Rana Mitter ([2013](#)) in the aptly titled *Forgotten Ally*) only increased its subsequent determination to steer an independent foreign policy path.

## **Hitler's world**

The rise of militarist factions in Japan was related to the effects of 1929, hastening Japanese imperialism and arguably helping to set Japan and the United States on a collision course in Asia. In Europe, the Great Depression and its consequences also helped to set in train a series of events that would propel the Nazis – until then a minor extremist party – to power in Germany and unleash foreign policy consequences with global dimensions. The possible consequences of Hitler's rise and foreign policy agenda were poorly appreciated at home and abroad, where many believed that the Nazis could be contained (Wright [2007](#)). Although Hitler's most important territorial and economic ambitions were largely European, centring on expanding living space (*Lebensraum*) for German peoples and economic growth, Germany's reach and impact was already global

and thus perceived as a direct threat to other powers. German airlines dominated South American routes, for example, and Germany's economic relationships with a number of Arab states and Iran were close. In another sense, however, Hitler's rise had little immediate relationship to events in Asia, except that both responded to the impact of the crash and unleashed forces within society that demanded change, overcoming the previously civilian governments in Tokyo and more moderate revisionists in Germany. While Hitler was not yet chancellor in 1931 when a Japanese army faction staged the incident in Manchuria leading to its annexation, the fact that Japan 'got away with it' cannot have been lost on Hitler and his inner circle. Similarly, the weak response of Britain, France and the League to Italy's expansion in Africa was another green light.

The idea that Adolf Hitler would lead Germany, and lead Germany to a new war against Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States, would have been unthinkable in the 1920s when the emphasis was on curbing Germany's power and on providing institutional checks and balances through the League and other mechanisms. The idea that a single individual could be held responsible for a global conflict of such proportions also sits uncomfortably with modern IR's emphasis on structural forces. However, the nature of Hitler's dictatorship meant that, directly or indirectly, he had extraordinary control over the foreign policymaking process. The fact remains that individual agency, whether in World War I, World War II or the Cold War, played a crucial role in the unfolding of events.

## **Appeasement and the path to war**

Appeasement is the flipside to Hitler's world. It is associated principally with British and French policies towards Germany in the 1930s – but can also be

applied with respect to policies towards Japanese and Italian expansionism in China and Africa – and therefore with the slide to World War II. It is also relevant to understanding the Nazi–Soviet Pact (1939), where the Soviet Union sought to delay war. It is epitomised by the Munich Agreement (1938), where British Prime Minister Chamberlain and French Prime Minister Daladier, in a bid to avert war, agreed to Hitler’s demands to annex the Sudetenland, the German-speaking territories of Czechoslovakia. This act, rather than curbing his demands, quickly led to further aggressive acts against Poland and then to war, and was therefore definitely the wrong policy at the wrong time: Germany had already been appeased over rearmament, the Rhineland reoccupation and then the Anschluss, all of which broke the provisions of the Versailles Treaty – although some viewed these as legitimate acts of revisionism against an unfair treaty. While its motives were somewhat similar to those of containment – to hold the line against further expansion – which was seen as a successful Cold War strategy of the United States, appeasement has been much criticised as policy of *giving in* to enemy demands, and therefore helping to precipitate rather than reverse the road to further expansion and ultimately war. While it has acquired a reputation as a weak, even cowardly, set of policies, the appeasement practices of the 1930s need to be contextualised carefully within the prevailing international environment in which many states and peoples, still reeling from the effects of World War I and the Great Depression, had no appetite for more war. Appeasement appeared as a rational strategy in the short term, given the unpreparedness of states like Britain, France and the Soviet Union for war. In the long term, though, the policy failed. The appeasement experience of the 1930s offered a number of salutary lessons to IR scholars and policymakers in the coming decades, with President Truman’s robust response in the Korean War (1950) informed by the failures of British and French policymakers in the 1930s and the perceived need to offer a strong response to aggression.

## **Conclusion: Reflections on the ‘great’ inter-war era**

In an important work first published in 1910, early liberal theorist Norman Angell (1912) described as ‘The Great Illusion’ the belief that wars were necessary for states to progress; in an age of growing interdependence, he highlighted how much states had to lose from fighting. He was right to point the costs of war, but wrong to suggest that they would not happen. Indeed, for his critics, his was the ‘great illusion’. It is not difficult to see why: the world saw two major wars within thirty years, and economic interdependence did little to prevent them. The inter-war period was one in which the adjective ‘great’ was used repeatedly – almost always negatively. Just as the ‘Great War’ followed on the heels of Angell’s work, then the ‘Great Crash’ broke the fleeting optimism of the 1920s, followed by the ‘Great Depression’, Stalin’s ‘Great Terror’ and ‘Great Purges’ and then another ‘Great War’ – a title that World War II surely also deserves. This was also the era of the first ‘Great Debate’ in IR theory between early liberal and realist thinkers – a debate that, in the short term, the liberals appeared to lose. Whether or not the use of such superlatives has been overstated, a lot was packed into these two decades. This chapter has sought to provide an overview of the inter-war period by highlighting its key developments and characteristics, and relating them to evolving debates in the subsequent development of IR. It has also aimed to demonstrate the critical importance of this twenty-odd-year period to the theory and practice of IR as it evolved over the century that followed. While this was a period of history in which the Europeans still flaunted their predominance – their wars became world wars, after all – closer inspection reveals powerful underlying currents and trends that foreshadowed a changing world in which European power would rapidly decline and a new world order with alternative centres would emerge –

whether the United States, Soviet Union, Japan or China. It was also an era in which so-called small or weak states started to find their voice in world politics.

## Discussion questions

**9.1** Give three examples of how World War I and its settlements had global rather than simply European consequences.

**9.2** What were some of the flaws in the design of the League of Nations?

**9.3** The inter-war period can often be seen as a period of failures. What were the successes?

**9.4** To what extent were China and Japan integrated into the various international political processes of the inter-war years?

**9.5** Why did states think (or hope) it was possible to appease Hitler?

**9.6** How were the political and economic crises of the inter-war period linked?

## *Further reading*

Best, A., Hanhimaki, J., Maiolo, J. and Schulze, K. 2015, *The international history of the 20th century and beyond*, 3rd ed., Abingdon: Routledge. *An excellent and comprehensive survey of twentieth-century history that gives due attention to changing global trends and developments.*

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Carr, E. 2016 [1946] *The twenty years' crisis 1919–1939: An introduction to the study of international relations*, London: Palgrave. *A brilliant essay on the two decades between the wars, which reveals the flaws of the post-war settlement and of the liberal thinking that underpinned it.*

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Iriye, A. 1987, *The Origins of the Second World War in the Asia Pacific*, London: Routledge. *An important study of the Asian origins of the war; an essential complement to European accounts.*

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Marks, S. 2002, *The ebbing of European ascendancy: An international history of the world 1914–1945*, New York: Hodder and Stoughton. *As its title suggests, this is a study of origins and reasons for the decline of European and the parallel rise of other powers.*

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Mazower, M. 2012, *Governing the world: The history of an idea*, London: Allen Lane. *A critical voice challenging the liberal view on the development of international institutions and the hierarchy of the Western world.*

# The Cold War and after



**Nick Bisley**

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## Introduction

The [Cold War](#) was the most important feature of the [international system](#) in the second half of the twentieth century. The rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States shaped the contours of conflict and cooperation among [states](#) and peoples between 1945 and 1991. Although the conflict did not drive all aspects of international relations, its impact could be felt in every corner of

the globe. Whether in Helsinki or Hanoi, Santiago or Sydney, the influence of [geopolitical](#) and ideological conflict was unmistakable. More importantly, the Cold War created rivalries and political faultlines that continue to shape international relations more than twenty-five years after the conflict ended.

The Cold War was a conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States (see [Box 10.1](#)). The two powers that emerged from World War II as pre-eminent in world politics became engaged in a protracted global contest that, although actual combat between them never eventuated, involved the largest and most destructive military arsenals in history. The two camps could potentially destroy the entire planet thousands of times over with their nuclear weapons, and each side's military was on a hair-trigger for the conflict's duration. It was a dispute that was driven both by traditional concerns about [security](#) – each felt the other threatening to its survival and its interests – as well as by ideological antagonism. Both embodied universal ideologies that asserted the superiority of their social system over all others. In this respect, the Cold War was as much a contest about how to organise society as it was a competition for strategic influence and nuclear superiority.

#### **Box 10.1: Terminology**

##### **Cold War: Meanings and temperature**

The term 'Cold War' is generally used in two ways. First, it refers to the global contest for influence and power between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, normally dated to between 1948 and 1991. Second, it is also used to label a broader period of international history in which the conflict was the pre-eminent feature of international politics. In spite of the many wars that were caused directly or indirectly by Soviet–American rivalry, such as in Korea, Vietnam and

Afghanistan, the conflict is referred to as ‘cold’ because, although there were near-misses, such as Cuba in 1962, direct military action between the two protagonists never eventuated.

In contrast to traditional [wars](#), which can be dated with some precision – such as a declaration of war or an invasion – there is no clear starting date for the Cold War; instead, it began with an accelerating escalation of tensions. Some historians have argued that, because it was animated by the revolutionary ideology at the heart of Soviet [power](#), its origins can be traced to the Russian [Revolution](#) of 1917 (Powaski [1998](#)). However, as an overt geopolitical and socio-economic contest, the Cold War began in the wake of World War II, with the collapse of the Grand [Alliance](#), the arrangement struck between the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union to defeat the Axis powers (Germany, Japan and Italy). Likewise, its termination has no clear surrender date or ‘armistice day’. The two dates commonly cited are those of the fall of the Berlin Wall on the night of 8–9 November 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union on New Year’s Eve, 1991.

## **The beginnings of the Cold War, 1945–53**

During the planning for the post-war world that had commenced towards the end of World War II, tensions between the Soviet and American allies began to emerge. They were already evident when US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin met at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, where discussions over Poland’s post-war status led to tensions (see [Figure 10.1](#)). President Roosevelt’s death in April

1945 contributed further to the breakdown of relations, as his successor, Harry Truman, took a more firmly anti-Soviet stance than his predecessor had done. After the defeat of Japan in August 1945, the alliance that had been formed in 1941 began to unravel swiftly. When the Soviet Union reneged on commitments to allow [self-determination](#) in Eastern Europe, failed to withdraw troops from Iran and demanded territorial concessions as well as bases from Turkey, US policy took a more confrontational line. This approach was informed by George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' of February 1946, where the Moscow-based diplomat argued that an accommodation between the Soviets and the Americans was impossible due to the essential character of Soviet power (see [Box 10.2](#)).



**Figure 10.1** Allied leaders Winston Churchill (UK), Franklin D. Roosevelt (US) and Joseph Stalin (USSR) at the Yalta Conference, February 1945

**Box 10.2:** Discussion points

**Containment and George Kennan**

George Kennan was one of the most influential figures in the early years of the Cold War, and is thought by many to be the father of America's grand strategy of [containment](#). The 'Long Telegram' was first sent as a diplomatic cable in February 1946. In the text, Kennan argued that the best US response to the Soviet Union was to establish lines of containment to limit the spread of Soviet power. This would constrain Soviet influence and allow the natural superiority of the US system to win out over what he saw to be a deeply flawed Soviet Union. The essence of the argument was subsequently published in the influential US journal, *Foreign Affairs*, in July 1947, with the author described as 'X' (Kennan [1947](#)). Containment became the centrepiece of US policy, but its realisation was far more interventionist than Kennan had envisaged. This occurred in part because Kennan became a peripheral figure in US foreign policy after the early 1950s.

The mistrust and suspicion soon turned into geopolitical and ideological competition (Yergin [1978](#)). In 1947, the United States pursued what came to be known as the [Truman Doctrine](#), whereby the United States provided military assistance to Turkey and Greece as part of a broader response to Soviet aggression and expansion. The view that the Soviet Union sought to take advantage of post-war Europe's vulnerability, where [communism](#) had considerable appeal in the ashes of war, was the motivating force behind the [Marshall Plan](#)'s economic reconstruction of Western Europe. The United States believed that an economically robust Western Europe would be politically stable and much less susceptible to the challenges of communism. The Plan involved large-scale loans that underwrote the economic reconstruction of Europe and

added momentum to the creation of the European Communities, the precursor to the European Union. The Plan was offered, somewhat disingenuously, to the Soviets, who turned it down as they recognised that it would compromise their strategic and economic interests in Eastern Europe.

The status of Berlin was the source of the first significant crisis of the conflict. Post-war Germany had been divided into four sectors, each run by one of the Allied powers. Berlin was similarly divided, but was located in the centre of East Germany, which was under Soviet control. The Soviets sought to claim Berlin, and in mid-1948 severed road and rail communications to the city. A massive airlift, which lasted nearly a year, ensured that West Berlin remained out of Soviet control, but political tensions escalated considerably as a result.

A year later, the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb. Now the animosity and rivalry were backed with the terrible power of atomic weaponry. This led to the creation of the [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#). NATO was intended to provide a formal structure for an American military presence in Europe that was to deter Soviet aggression and to counter the Soviet Union's conventional weapon superiority. In response, the Soviets created the [Warsaw Pact](#) as a counter-weight in 1955. Ten years after they had fought successfully to defeat Nazi Germany, the erstwhile allies were now lined up against one another. Europe was divided between a Soviet-dominated East, where liberated states were run by communist [regimes](#) loyal to and propped up by the Soviet Union, and a democratic West, whose security relied on US military power. Concerns about Soviet expansionism in the West appeared to be confirmed by Berlin and the bomb; fear in the East about American threats was realised by the ongoing presence of US conventional and atomic weapons in Western Europe.

The Cold War had its origins in, and in the first instance was a conflict over, Europe. From the outset, however, it posed global challenges (see [Figure](#)

10.2). Two events in Asia brought this home. The defeat of Japan had reignited the Chinese [Civil War](#), which had been running since the fall of the Manchu Dynasty in 1911. The surprising victory of Mao Zedong's Soviet Union-supported communist forces meant that both the world's most geographically expansive state and its most populous country were now communist. Viewed from Western capitals, Soviet forces and allies spread from the Baltic Sea across the Eurasian landmass to the South China Sea.



**Figure 10.2** The Cold War: NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, 1949–89  
Legend: NATO members – green Warsaw Pact members – orange

The second aspect of the Cold War's spread occurred in Korea. The Korean peninsula had been a Japanese colony since 1910, and was hastily divided in the wake of Japan's defeat. In June 1950, the Soviet-backed North launched an attack on the US-supported South, which confirmed in the minds of the Western allies that communist forces were not only aggressive but emboldened by success in China and elsewhere. Aided by the newly formed [United Nations](#) the United States and its allies fought a long and bloody war in which more than

three million people lost their lives. In 1953, an armistice was signed but to this day the border remains a geostrategic flashpoint.

## **The Cold War spreads, 1953–69**

The Korean War convinced the United States and its allies that communism was aggressive and reinforced the sense that it was a monolithic bloc. Soviets, Chinese and Koreans appeared to be part of a unified system with global ambitions. As such, a concerted global response to contain communist influence was thought to be necessary. This prompted the United States to sign a series of alliance treaties in the Asia-Pacific, including [ANZUS](#) in 1951 and [SEATO](#) in 1954. It was also a key factor driving US policy in Indochina. In Europe, NATO was organisationally and militarily strengthened, with the United States committing to a long-term and large-scale military presence to deter Soviet conventional forces. Through the 1950s and 1960s, both Soviets and Americans enhanced their conventional and nuclear arsenals.

After Korea, the dynamics of East–West confrontation began to spread and interact with regional developments across the world. It had particular purchase in the struggles that were prompted by the dismantling of European empires. In Iran, Guatemala and the Middle East in the early 1950s, local political elites attempted to gain domestic advantage by playing on US and Soviet perceptions of their relative strategic importance. Although Stalin's death in March 1953 brought the more conciliatory Nikita Khrushchev to power, Soviet support for national liberation movements, such as in the Congo and Cuba, along with its intervention in Hungary in 1956, confirmed the perception in Washington that the Soviet Union continued to pose a threat to the United States and its allies, and to their economic and strategic interests around the world.

Tensions reached a high point in the Berlin crisis of 1961 and the [Cuban missile crisis](#) of 1962. The former involved a dangerous military stand-off that led to the construction of the infamous Berlin Wall, which prevented East Berliners moving to the West. The heavily fortified physical division of the city was a potent symbol of the split and its tragic human consequences – hundreds were killed trying to cross from East to West during the wall's twenty-eight-year existence. The latter crisis, where the Soviet Union secretly deployed missiles 90 miles (145 kilometres) off the US coast, only to withdraw them after tense negotiations, led to a humiliating back-down for Khrushchev. The Soviet leader had attempted to place strategic pressure on the United States, but in spite of achieving a trade-off removal of US missiles from Turkey, was perceived to have been outfoxed by President Kennedy. His position at home was fatally weakened and US decision-makers began to believe that they were gaining an upper hand in the global contest. Both crises had brought the world extraordinarily close to nuclear annihilation, and this resulted in improved communications between Washington and Moscow and a somewhat more stable platform for Soviet–American relations for the next decade or so. Nonetheless, it confirmed to both sides that the other posed a fundamental threat. Consequently, the arms race continued apace during this phase (see [Box 10.3](#)) and they also jostled for influence and advantage across the globe. In 1965, the United States made the fateful decision to escalate its support for South Vietnam in its struggle with the North, and to participate in a large-scale ground war, which ultimately led to an embarrassing withdrawal in 1973 after domestic political support for the conflict collapsed. US policy had been driven by ultimately unfounded fears that the defeat of South Vietnam at the hands of Ho Chi Minh's communist forces would destabilise the region and strengthen the appeal and success of communism across Southeast Asia.

**Box 10.3:** Discussion points**The arms race**

One of the central features of the Cold War was competition over strategic arms. After World War II, technological sophistication in weaponry grew rapidly and each advance appeared to give the holder a decisive advantage. The arms race was the acute end of the conflict, and involved both conventional and nuclear weapons. It began with Soviet efforts to break the US atomic monopoly, which succeeded in 1949. It was a race that involved an expansion in the quantity of weapons as well as the development of more sophisticated delivery systems such as intercontinental bombers, ballistic missiles and multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (MIRV) that increased the damage caused by a single missile. In 1950, the United States had a stockpile of around 450 atomic weapons and the Soviet Union had several. By 1985, the United States had over 11 000 nuclear weapons and the Soviet Union around 9500, including both bombs and missile warheads.

That this did not occur was partly due to the breakdown of Chinese–Soviet relations. While the West had perceived a monolithic communist entity in the Soviet–China alliance, relations had always been uneasy. After Stalin’s death, personal clashes between Mao and Khrushchev, along with ideological differences and competition for leadership of the communist movement, as well as Soviet refusal to pass on atomic technology, led to the deterioration of relations. Few in the West realised that relations had become so bad, and it was not until the short 1969 Sino-Soviet border war that it became clear that the communist bloc had fragmented.

## Détente and the ‘second’ Cold War, 1969–85

The policy of [détente](#) was a deliberate attempt to improve Soviet–American relations, and the hostility that had emerged between China and the Soviet Union provided the strategic opening that made it possible. The United States, led by President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, sought to capitalise on the new and mutual antagonism between China and the Soviet Union in order to improve relations with both states and allow the United States to extricate itself from Vietnam and contain Soviet nuclear weapon acquisition. US recognition of the People’s Republic of China in 1972, the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty in the same year and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 were the key achievements of détente. The latter was notable for establishing principles of [human rights](#) as the basis for future Soviet–American discussions. Symbolically, détente was embodied by the meeting of a US Apollo and Soviet Soyuz spacecraft in orbit in July 1975.

Yet the achievements in [arms control](#) (see [Chapter 14](#)), improvements in communication and the civility of diplomatic language did not remove the underlying hostility between the two sides, and their mutual distrust was never far from the surface. Both sides were entangled in the Arab–Israeli war of 1973, and by the mid-1970s the mood had begun to shift. The Soviet Union was thought to have been taking advantage of the improved relations to escalate its support for revolutionary movements around the world. The success of revolutions in Ethiopia, Iran, Cambodia, Angola, Afghanistan and Nicaragua in the second half of the 1970s, and particularly the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, were seen by critics as the result of an overly soft approach to the Soviet Union.

The worldwide spread of communism prompted a view in the United States that its foreign policy was weakening alongside a poorly performing economy

that had been affected badly by the oil shocks of the 1970s and the decline of its manufacturing base. These concerns propelled Ronald Reagan to the US presidency in the 1980 election. Reagan had campaigned on taking a harder line on the Soviet Union, and from the start of his presidency in 1981 began to put pressure on the Soviets. This involved large increases in military spending, active intervention in Soviet allied states such as El Salvador and Nicaragua, and an increasingly bellicose rhetoric. The shooting down of a Korean Air Lines passenger jet that had strayed over Soviet airspace in 1983 starkly illustrated the heightened tension and sense of risk at the time. Arms control negotiations collapsed, the United States increased its interventions in Central America and elsewhere, and Reagan launched a space-based missile defence initiative, dubbed 'Star Wars'. By 1984, Europe was experiencing levels of tension unseen since the early days of the Cold War, and there was a renewed sense that nuclear war was a very real possibility (Halliday [1986](#)).

## **The end of the Cold War, 1985–91**

The transformation of the Cold War was as radical as it was rapid, and was a function of both individual roles and the broader structural circumstances of international relations. The key development was the 1985 selection of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Communist Party (see [Box 10.4](#)) by the Politburo, the party's key policy-making and governing body. The economy of the Soviet Union had been stagnant since 1978, compromising its strategic position, which was further tested by the cost of attempting to maintain technological parity with the United States. Gorbachev was determined to revitalise the Soviet Union through an extensive reform program, and he

launched a program of foreign policy reform to create an international environment more conducive to economic revitalisation.

**Box 10.4:** Key figures

**Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev**

The eighth and last leader of the Soviet Union was, other than Lenin, the only one to have graduated from university. He was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985 following the death of Konstantin Chernenko. He was a surprise choice: he had only been elevated to the Politburo in 1978 and was one of its youngest members. Following decades of dour and elderly political leaders in Moscow, Gorbachev and his foreign minister, the charismatic Eduard Shevardnadze, represented an important shift in generation, experience and worldview. Gorbachev was educated, had travelled and, most crucially, did not follow the traditional Kremlin path in his dealings with outsiders. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher famously declared that he was a man ‘with whom we can do business’, and it was this capacity to ‘do business’ that was central to his success. Many individual leaders played important roles in the development of the conflict, but none can match Gorbachev’s significance in bringing the curtain down on the Cold War.

Reagan’s first term in office was characterised by notable hostility towards the Soviet Union, but his attitude shifted after during the re-election year of 1984. Following a summit meeting in Geneva in late 1985, he became receptive to Gorbachev’s arms-reduction proposals, and together they enhanced the two

states' sense of trust (Garthoff [1994](#)). The Soviet foreign policy reform program involved a massive reduction in conventional and nuclear weapons and a shift to a purely defensive military doctrine. The Soviets also adopted a more liberal posture towards the international system – one focused on institutions, human rights and the international rule of law – and ceased its support for revolutionary movements and 'fraternal' communist regimes.

The reforms developed in a piecemeal fashion between 1985 and 1989, and famously culminated in the 'velvet revolutions' in Eastern Europe. As Gorbachev brought *perestroika* (restructuring), *glasnost* (openness) and [democratisation](#) to the Soviet Union, popular dissatisfaction with the regimes in Eastern Europe emerged. This sentiment was led by movements for change, most famously embodied in Poland by Lech Walesa's *Solidarność* (Solidarity) – the Eastern Bloc's first independent trade union – and created huge pressure on Soviet control mechanisms. The Soviet leadership determined that the time had come to end its determination of politics and strategy in Eastern Europe (known as the Brezhnev doctrine). Gorbachev felt that the regimes, if they stood for anything, would have to stand for themselves – something that they proved utterly incapable of doing. After 1989, the reform program within the Soviet Union also began to spin out of the Communist Party's control, as democratisation and new freedoms mixed with an explosive [nationalism](#) that eventually destroyed the Soviet Union. As an entity, the Soviet Union was replaced by a series of new [sovereign states](#) that were based on the organisational structure of its constituent republics, and the geopolitical map of Central and Eastern Europe was rewritten as their Soviet-supported governments were rejected *en masse* (see [Box 10.5](#)).

It was the shift within the Soviet Union, and its acceptance by the US-led West, that brought about the end of the Cold War. It had been a conflict between competing ideologies as well as a geopolitical struggle between states. It came to

an end with the rejection by elites within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's revolutionary ideas and the policies that sprang from them. While the Cold War had been very much about strategic threats and nuclear weapons, these were a means through which the contest was played out but were not the contest itself. Many think Reagan won the Cold War by out-spending the Soviet Union in the military competition; however, there is little evidence to support this view. The Soviets were most certainly at a decisive strategic disadvantage by the late 1970s, and Reagan's pressure mattered to Soviet perceptions, but the motivating force behind the foreign policy reform program was not strategic but political and economic, and was generated internally by Communist Party elites.

#### **Box 10.5:** Discussion points

##### **A new European map**

The end of the Cold War transformed world politics, bringing a raft of new states into the international system. From the collapse of the Soviet Union came the following new sovereign states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation (Russia), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Russia became the legal heir of the Soviet Union's international commitments, such as its seat at the United Nations, and founded the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), incorporating twelve Soviet republics, to try to assert some vestiges of its [hegemony](#). In Eastern and Central Europe, more states were created: Czechoslovakia peacefully divided into the Czech and Slovak republics, while the collapse of Yugoslavia involved a series of bloody wars that created new states from the constituent republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

## The Cold War and International Relations

IR [theory](#) has a close relationship with the Cold War, as many of the [discipline](#)'s theoretical developments were in response to changes in the dynamics of conflict. The rise of [realism](#) was produced by the dominance of geopolitics during the early phases of the Cold War. Détente's optimism helped revive liberal internationalism and brought the cooperative possibilities of [interdependence](#) to the table, and the role that ideas played in the Cold War's demise helped facilitate the rise of [constructivism](#). Beyond this, the Cold War provokes many questions that theory can help answer. Why did the United States–Soviet alliance, which had worked so well during World War II, break down? Why did the United States and the Soviet Union never come to blows? What role did the leaders play in shaping the conflict? Why did it end so suddenly? Why did no one predict its demise?

Of the many issues involved, the question of causation is perhaps most important. What were the causes of the Cold War? The answer to this complex question depends on which theory one turns to, and thus which assumptions one makes. For realists, the answer lies in the power vacuum in the international system after 1945 (e.g. see Gaddis [1990](#); Wohlforth [1993](#)). Prior to World War II, both the United States and the Soviet Union were significant powers, but neither was dominant and neither was interested in projecting its power much beyond its borders. Germany, Britain, France and Italy were all major powers with expansive international interests and considerable military force. The calamity of World War II destroyed the basis of these states' power, and into this vacuum stepped a largely unscathed United States and a battle-damaged but

militarily dominant Soviet Union. Here, the Cold War was a product of the inexorable workings of the international system, whereby major powers are compelled to expand their interests or fall prey to others who have expanded. In Western Europe, there was no dominant power, and thus the system induced American and Soviet rivalry; this went global as [decolonisation](#) provided further opportunities for advantage. For realists (see [Chapter 3](#)), the Cold War was a contest of [power politics](#) in which ideology was little more than window dressing.

A different theoretical approach – that of [liberalism](#) (see [Chapter 2](#)) – does not look at the system so much as the attributes of its constituent states. While liberals do not deny the importance of the military rivalry, they look to ineffective policies, misperceptions and miscommunication between political elites (e.g. see Jervis [1976](#); Larson [1985](#)) to explain the conflict. While realists see conflict as inevitable, liberals see it as contingent on specific actions. The Cold War was not caused by a power vacuum, but rather was the product of [diplomatic](#) blundering and misunderstanding. Rivalry was not inevitable, but was the product of a mutual sense of insecurity that could have been resolved. Improved communication and better understanding of the other side's intentions and concerns could have produced a workable and cooperative international system and a much more peaceful post-war setting.

There are a host of other explanations, with some arguing that the Cold War was a product of [capitalist](#) international relations, which fosters militaristic competition among states. For others, the Cold War was not really a clash of values and interests but a military exercise that was used by both sides to establish and further their respective domination of domestic society (Chomsky [1982](#); Kaldor [1990](#)). These theories produce different answers because they place explanatory emphasis on various aspects of the conflict. They can help to

clarify thinking, but careful attention must be paid to the basic assumptions they make about social behaviour, and upon which they place explanatory weight.

Perhaps the most enduring conundrum of the Cold War relates to something that did not happen. Why did the United States and the Soviet Union avoid military conflict? The greatest source of concern for all who lived through the Cold War was the apocalyptic prospect of nuclear war. There are many reasons put forward to explain the absence of war. Some point to good communication and effective diplomacy in times of crisis; others argue that it was their lack of physical proximity that kept the peace. The most influential answer to this question is also one of the most controversial: that [peace](#) between the United States and the Soviet Union was brought about by nuclear weapons. So massive was the price that would have to be paid if conflict eventuated that both sides were forced to adopt less bellicose policies. From this point of view, the long post-war peace (at least between the chief protagonists) was kept by the very weapons they had acquired to destroy one another. The idea that peace was enforced by a balance of terror is hard to refute, for the simple reason that it is logically impossible to say why something did *not* happen. It is no doubt true that the weapons inspired caution – as, indeed, did the scale of their conventional arsenals, but we cannot say with any certainty that peace was the product of nuclear weapons. More importantly, the level of risk that is involved in structuring the international system around nuclear deterrence is massive and it must surely be the least rational means of managing international peace yet devised.

## **Conclusion: The continuing legacy of the Cold War**

For its duration, the Cold War rivalry played a dominant role in world politics. Nowhere was its influence more evident than in anti-colonial struggles and in the politics of post-colonial states. From Tehran to Tokyo, Jakarta to Johannesburg, East–West rivalry put local conflicts into a global context. The political struggles to fill the holes created by departing European powers had a broader consequence as both the Soviet Union and the United States saw the other's gain as its loss in the battle for hearts, minds and strategic influence in the decolonising world. A communist North Vietnam or South Yemen was thought to be not only a loss from the ledger of capitalist states but also a decisive strategic advantage for Soviet communism. Just as Soviet–US rivalry had consequences far from home, the Cold War left a legacy with which we are still coming to terms (Westad [2005](#)).

Three of the most pressing issues in world politics – East Asia's flashpoints in Korea and Taiwan, Islamist [terrorism](#) and Russia's increasing assertiveness – have their roots in the Cold War and its end. Cold War tension continues to shape the strategic balance in Northeast Asia. This is most obvious in Korea, where the peninsula remains divided. North Korea is one of the few states that retains a command economy and a Stalinist political system, and that is in the process of acquiring nuclear weapons. Cold War tension continues to shape the strategic balance in Northeast Asia. Taiwan's uncertain political status is also the unfinished business of the Cold War. Created by the nationalists who had lost the Chinese Civil War, it was initially recognised by the United States as the legitimate China, only to have this recognition removed as the United States improved its relations with the People's Republic of China during détente. Tensions in East Asia have grown precipitously in recent years, and the US security guarantees to South Korea and Taiwan, dating from the earliest years of the Cold War, make the region one of the more likely locations of major power conflict in the international system.

As the horror of the 9/11 terrorist attacks unfolded before a television audience of billions, few realised that they were witnessing an after-shock of the Cold War. Yet it was the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the US funding of [guerrilla](#) insurgents that gave birth to al-Qaeda and its off-shoots, such as [Islamic State \(IS\)](#). Soviet forces were defeated by a combination of Afghan militias and guerrillas of a militant Islamist variety, whose funding and organisation were heavily assisted by the United States. Many of the key radical Islamists, from members of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria to Hambali and Imam Samudra in Indonesia, learnt their trade in Afghanistan in the 1980s and early 1990s. The ‘war on terror’ that dominated the foreign policy of the United States and many of its allies between 2001 and 2009, and that directly contributed to the ongoing problems in Iraq and Syria, was a direct – though utterly unintended – consequence of the Cold War’s strategic competition and the indirect manner of its prosecution.

The highly nationalistic, assertive and destabilising foreign and defence policy pursued by Russia over the past decade or so is being pursued as part of a broader ambit to redeem the geopolitical greatness of the Soviet Union. That it collapsed in the way that it did, and in the humiliation experienced by Russia in the decade after 1991, were crucial drivers of Russia’s ambitious and unsettling international policy. President Putin is reported to have described the Soviet Union’s collapse as one the greatest geopolitical catastrophes of the twentieth century.

Understood in this context, much of Russia’s current foreign policy can be seen as an attempted reassertion of its former superpower status. Putin’s annexation of the Crimea in 2014 represented the first time a European border had been transgressed by force since World War II. The heir to the Soviet Union remains the occupying force and is likely to have de facto control of the vital peninsula for some time. Russia has also played a more muscular role in the

Middle East. Its support of the Assad regime in Syria is intended both to protect its basing rights in the country and to undermine US strategy in the key region. In 2016, Russia and China conducted a large-scale military exercise in the hotly contested South China Sea, and Russia has actively been pressuring Japan as it seeks to stake a strategic claim in Asia.

The decade following the Cold War's demise was one of distinct optimism in international relations. Long-unrepresented peoples were able to enjoy self-determination; the prospect of imminent nuclear annihilation had receded; and the strife associated with East–West rivalry had largely faded into the distance. Yet, in the history of contemporary issues, the Cold War carries a heavy weight. In East Asia, Islamist terrorism and Russian revanchism we see only the most acute examples of this legacy. From ethnic conflicts in the states of the former Soviet Union to environmental problems in Eastern Europe, from civil war in Angola to the still completely unresolved political problems in Cambodia, the Cold War's imprint can still be seen around the world. Some argue that it is not only in the events that we feel its effect: in the very way in which the United States and its allies think about international politics, we can detect the continuing influence of a Cold War approach to the world. China perceives that the US approach to it is born of the East–West [bipolar](#) conflict and the search for enemies to demonise and defeat. The Cold War may be more than a quarter of a century gone, but it will be a long time before its influence has passed from being among the central concerns for scholars, policy-makers and analysts of international relations.

## Discussion questions

### 10.1 Could the Cold War have been avoided?

**10.2** Does the Cold War confirm or refute the view that conflict is inevitable in the international system?

**10.3** The Cold War began as a dispute in Europe. Why did it spread around the world?

**10.4** Was the American historian John Lewis Gaddis right to describe the Cold War as a ‘long peace’?

**10.5** Did détente fail?

**10.6** What role did nuclear weapons play in the Cold War?

**10.7** Who should take credit for the end of the Cold War?

**10.8** In what ways is the Cold War still visible in the contemporary international system?

### *Further reading*

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## Part 3



# The traditional agenda

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# The modern state



**Richard Devetak**

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## Introduction

This chapter introduces the principal actor in international relations: the [sovereign state](#). It begins by defining the [state](#). Second, it explores the origins of the state in the transition from the Medieval to the modern world. Third, it examines the concept of [sovereignty](#), especially as it was enunciated in early modern political thought. Fourth, it surveys different historical explanations of

how the sovereign state triumphed over alternative forms of political society. Finally, it surveys some of the continuing debates about the morality and utility of the modern state.

## What is a state?

The state may not be the only actor in world politics (see [Chapter 23](#)), but it is widely recognised as the one that has the greatest impact on people's lives. It is, as John Dunn (2000: 66) says, 'the principal institutional site of political experience'. This is why the title of J.D.B. Miller's book, *A World of States* (1981), seems like such an apt description of international relations. But although we live in a world of states today, it was not always thus. At various moments in time, city-states, empires, feudal states, absolutist states or [nation-states](#) have been the dominant institutional form. So, although humanity has always been divided into separate political societies, the character of these societies has varied both historically and geographically. Sovereign states are distinctly modern inventions, and how long they will remain the principal institutional site of politics is a contentious issue, with some scholars suggesting that [globalisation](#) may be eclipsing the sovereign state (see [Chapter 28](#)). Whether or not the sovereign state is declining in importance, moral doubts about it continue to find expression. The state is, in many respects, a perpetually controversial subject precisely because it has been so central to domestic and international political life since the sixteenth century.

It is worth noting at the outset that a modern state, in its simplest sense, refers to an abstract entity comprising a government, a population and a territory (see [Box 11.1](#)). Much more needs to be said about this abstract entity, but for the moment it is enough to note that it possesses 'a collective personality which

makes it immortal' (van Creveld [1999](#): 258). Governments come and go, citizens of a population are born and die, territorial borders may shift, but the state – as 'a continuing structure of government, decision-making, legal interpretation and enforcement' (Dunn [2000](#): 80) – remains.

### **Box 11.1: Terminology**

#### **The state, the modern state and sovereignty**

*State* = government + population + territory

*Modern state* = state + sovereignty + nation

*Sovereignty* denotes a single, supreme decision-making authority.

Article 1 of the 1933 *Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States* ([1933](#)) lists four criteria of statehood:

- 1 population
- 2 territory
- 3 government
- 4 recognition by other states.

One of the most incisive and influential definitions of the modern state was offered by the great German social and economic theorist Max Weber (1864–1920) at the beginning of the twentieth century. He defined the state as a 'human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber [1948](#): 78). While this is

consistent with the above definition of the modern state, it places the emphasis firmly on what the state does, rather than what it aspires to be or to achieve. States are indeed political associations where governmental apparatuses, composed of politicians and administrative officials, establish and implement laws regulating social life within a particular territory in pursuit of various political doctrines. But for Weber, the key to understanding the state lies neither in the laws nor the political doctrines, but rather in the *means* by which governmental rule is sustained: coercion.

For Weber and historical sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, Michael Mann, Theda Skocpol and Charles Tilly, the state is best defined in terms of means specific to its functions: namely, the control and organisation of the force that underpins its rule. Tilly ([1985](#): 170) defines states as ‘relatively centralised, differentiated organisations the officials of which more or less successfully claim control over the chief concentrated means of violence within a population inhabiting a large, contiguous territory’. His definition includes reference to territory and population, but the key issue for him is control over the coercive means. This may seem counter-intuitive, given that the state is commonly understood to be concerned with [order](#) and [peace](#), but order and peace require *enforcement* through courts of law and the police. States claim a monopoly over the right to enforce the law internally and provide [security](#) against external threats through the establishment of police and military forces. So force and the threat of force have always been integral to states, both in their formation and in their maintenance, internally and externally.

One further important point to note hinges on Weber’s word ‘legitimate’. While states may exercise [power](#) and seek control, it is *authority* rather than power or control that defines the modern state’s sovereignty and legitimacy. Although none can fully control its territory, states nonetheless claim the

legitimate right or authority to make and enforce laws of their own choosing. This is an important mark of sovereignty.

The modern assumption, now taken for granted, is that a sovereign power claims *supreme* and *exclusive* authority to rule over a clearly bordered territory, and that the population residing there constitutes a nation (see [Chapter 12](#)). A modern state therefore is a particular model of political society; it is, most importantly, a state conceptualised as sovereign (see [Box 11.2](#)). It possesses ‘the right to be obeyed without challenge’ (Dunn [2000](#): 80). Later, we will sketch the historical process through which the modern state achieved this supreme and exclusive authority, but first it is important to identify the origins of the modern state’s central ideas. While the focus here will be on the European context, the historical process by which the modern state developed and emerged across the world is a global story of the globalisation of international society (see [Chapter 19](#) and Dunne and Reus-Smit [2017](#)). That story cannot fully be understood from a [Eurocentric](#) perspective, but involves connections, encounters, and exchanges across the oceans and vast land masses of the globe (Armitage [2013](#): Chapters 2–3; Bayly [2004](#); Devetak and Tannock [2017](#)).

#### **Box 11.2:** Discussion points

##### **When a state is not a state**

It should be noted that in countries with federal systems, like the United States and Australia, the constituent parts are also called states. But California and Texas, Victoria and New South Wales, as large, wealthy and internationally active as they may now be, are not the states generally referred to in the study of international relations. Primarily, when the word ‘state’ is used, what is meant is the political unit or ‘country’ that claims, and is internationally recognised as possessing,

sovereignty. These are the states represented in atlases of the world and with seats at the [United Nations](#).

## Origins of the modern state

The concept of state is not as ancient as may at first be thought. As Quentin Skinner ([1989](#)) has demonstrated, it was only in the sixteenth century that the word ‘state’ acquired a meaning close to the modern sense, referring to an abstract, impersonal entity, separate from the person of the prince. It was also around this time that, in the English-speaking world at least, discussions about the state, its purpose and powers became widespread (Skinner [2009](#): 326). This part of the chapter sketches some of the features that marked Medieval Europe, contrasting it with the modern system that was eventually to follow.

Prior to the birth of state sovereignty, Europe looked like a patchwork quilt of overlapping and intersecting layers of power, authority and allegiance. Power, authority and allegiance were not monopolised by a central government, but shared among different actors – not just prince and parliament, but also the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor and jealous dukes and counts, many of whom were related by blood (note that the term ‘prince’ – derived from the Latin *princeps*, meaning first or chief – was often used to refer to the ruler). Quite often, territory was partitioned, splintered and non-contiguous, and there existed no effective centre or capital capable of exerting its will exclusively and effectively over its disparate territories.

Medieval Europe thus presented a markedly different political map from the modern one with which we are familiar. This is not to say that the Medieval world was sheer chaos and disorder. A powerful sense of order and social

identity was provided by an over-arching Christianity. The many fragments of the European patchwork saw themselves as local embodiments of a much larger universal community under the power of God and His earthly representatives in the Church. Indeed, in many ways it was Christendom that provided the only source of unity and identity in a fractured Europe. However, the Catholic papacy always struggled to exert its authority across all of Christian Europe; it constantly ran up against the earthly power, authority and will of princes, including the Holy Roman Emperor, not to mention the clergy and faithful of Protestant confessions. Ultimately, none of the pretenders to universal domination could overcome the ‘feudal’ character of European society.

The fragmented, decentralised system of government that dominated the Medieval period (roughly from 500BCE to 1500CE) is now known as feudalism. Joseph Strayer ([1965](#): 12–13) identified three characteristic features of feudalism: the fragmentation of political power, public power in private possession and armed forces secured through private agreements. Benno Teschke, drawing more from a Marxist perspective (see [Chapter 4](#)), offers a similar account, also emphasising the geographic decentralisation, institutionally personalised government and equally personalised, if divided, control over the instruments of violence. The feudal state, he says, was essentially ‘an ensemble of lordships’ (Teschke [2004](#): 31), with each lord claiming control over a share of the instruments of violence and, importantly for Teschke ([2004](#): 31–2), a share of the land and labour. Political rather than economic accumulation, he says, was the driving force, pushing forward military innovation while the economy remained stagnant. However, he adds, eventually ‘the systematic build-up of military power was also the precondition for, as well as the consequence of, intensifying the exploitation of labour’ (Teschke [2004](#): 32).

Because the king lacked the administrative and financial capacity to extend his authority across the whole divided kingdom, he would appoint

representatives – usually a count or duke – to administer justice at the local levels. Strayer (1965: 30) tells us that these local counts exercised ‘full military, judicial and financial power’ at the king’s behest. The danger was that as counts and dukes consolidated their power by fighting wars, administering law and justice, and raising revenue through taxation, they became increasingly proprietorial; as Strayer (1965: 30) puts it, ‘they became virtually independent rulers’. In time, the local power bases of counts and dukes grew to the point where they could challenge the capacity of royal power to impose its will.

Centripetal forces were thus constantly balanced by centrifugal ones in the Medieval world. Tangled webs of dynastic power and splintered authority were spread unevenly across a fragmented European geography. Popes and princes had competing and cross-cutting interests that were often complicated by inter-marriage, papal decrees, competing or overlapping territorial claims, conflicting religious beliefs and general diplomatic intrigue and deception. Power and authority were thus shared or partitioned among a variety of actors. As a consequence, as Teschke (2004: 31) notes, there was ‘no distinct sphere of anarchical “international” relations’, because a clear distinction between the interior and exterior of states could not be drawn.

The important point for us about this Medieval mosaic is that political space (territory) and authority (government) rarely, if ever, coincided with homogeneous communities (nations) to produce integrated political units. It was only with the rise of sovereign states that international relations, properly speaking, emerged.

## **The idea of the sovereign state**

This section introduces and outlines one of the most central – if controversial – concepts in the study of politics and international relations: sovereignty. It asks two questions: What does sovereignty mean? And how and why did the idea of the sovereign state arise? To help explain what sovereignty means, it is helpful to understand three eminent attempts to characterise sovereignty in early modern Europe: Jean Bodin's and Thomas Hobbes's absolutist accounts, and Emer de Vattel's law of nations account. These will help to convey the two interrelated dimensions of sovereignty: internal supremacy and external independence.

### **The meaning of state sovereignty**

The principle of sovereignty found its first systematic presentation in Frenchman Jean Bodin's (1530–96) *Six Books of the Republic*, published in 1576 (Bodin [1992 \[1576\]](#)). This was a time of tremendous political violence and instability in France, driven by religious conflict. In 1572, tens of thousands of Huguenots (French Protestants) were killed in what is known as the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Since the mid-sixteenth century, the Huguenots had been agitating for greater religious tolerance in France, struggling to resist occasional attempts by the Catholic crown to impose religious uniformity by force. Although Bodin agreed that the Catholic kings had adopted tyrannical policies against the Protestants, he denied that Huguenots had a right to resist the king. To allow this right would be to unleash [anarchy](#) and [civil war](#), destroying any prospect of political stability, he believed.

Bodin's central innovation was to argue that power and authority should be concentrated in a single decision-maker – preferably the king. He believed that a well-ordered society required an 'absolute and perpetual power', namely the sovereign, who would hold the 'highest power of command' (Bodin [1992](#): 1). One of the key aspects of sovereignty, as presented by Bodin, was that law and

order could only be maintained within a society if one power alone possessed a distinct prerogative across the territorial jurisdiction. To make good on this idea, rules had to consolidate and unify previously detached territorial segments and populations. Most importantly, they had to monopolise the right to use instruments of force. The end-result was a sovereign state characterised by a single, supreme legal and political power exercised over a society and territory.

Hobbes' (1588–1679) *Leviathan* ([1968 \[1651\]](#)), published in the context of English civil strife – advances a powerful argument for establishing state sovereignty around a [theory](#) of political obligation. Hobbes argued that in the condition before a state is formed, individuals live in what he calls a 'state of nature' (see [Box 3.1](#)), where there is no 'common Power to keep them all in awe' ([1968](#): 185). In the absence of an over-arching authority, there can be no peace or security because there is nothing to stop individuals from harming one another. The state of nature is a condition lacking any rules, and therefore any justice; mutual fear and insecurity are its defining features. According to Hobbes, only the establishment of a sovereign state – through a 'social contract' where the sovereign promises to protect and subjects promise to obey – can create the conditions of security and order necessary for society to develop freedom and industry. Like Bodin, Hobbes pressed the case for a single central authority with the power to enforce decisions. Sovereignty therefore implies authority to prevail over a jurisdiction.

The original frontispiece to Hobbes' *Leviathan* provides a brilliant image of the sovereign as conceived by absolutist thinkers (see [Figure 11.1](#)). One of the most striking and memorable images in the history of political theory, it contains the image of a crowned prince standing majestically over his land and people, sword in one hand, crozier (bishop's staff) in the other, keeping watch over an orderly and peaceful city and surrounding countryside. A careful look at the image reveals that the prince's body is made up of tiny people all looking up to

the prince. The image is a wonderful representation that captures several influential ideas about the state.

- First, and foremost, the sovereign is supreme and absolute, standing over and above a loyal people and territory. This absolutist idea is supported by the Latin inscription at the top of the page. It is a fragment that translates as, ‘There is no power on earth that can be compared with him ...’ Hobbes found this fragment and the very image of leviathan in the Old Testament Book of Job.
- Second, the instruments of coercion (represented by the sword) and religion (the crozier) are firmly in the grip of the prince. Two points are conveyed simultaneously here: that sovereign power monopolises law through its enforcement capacity, and that there is no higher earthly power than the state, including the Church.
- Third, the state is like a natural human body. Indeed, it was commonplace then, as now, to speak of the ‘body politic’ (Skinner [2009](#)). Hobbes’ Introduction to the *Leviathan* explicitly says that the state ‘is but an Artificiall Man’ ([1968](#): 81), from which we can infer a head (of state) with its unique rationality ([raison d’état](#), or reason of state), and a unified body with protective skin (borders) to keep out foreign bodies.
- Fourth, as feminist theorists point out, there is an obvious gendered character to the imagery of the body politic. The state’s masculine identity is linked to an assumption that man is the natural bearer of reason, authority and power (see Gatens [1996](#); Pateman [1988](#)).



**Figure 11.1** The frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, 1651

Hobbes saw with great clarity that achieving peace *within* states did little to diminish insecurity and violence *among* them; sovereign states were themselves plunged into a state of nature or 'state of war', which in contemporary parlance is called international anarchy. States became 'masterlesse men', in Hobbes' (1968: 238) evocative words, adopting 'the posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their Forts,

Garrisons, and Guns upon the Frontiers of their Kingdoms; and continuall Spyes upon their neighbours; which is a posture of war' (1968: 187–8). Not only does this point to the state's constant need to prepare for war if it is to be secure (see [Chapter 13](#)), but also to the external independence (or 'masterlessness') of sovereign states.

This claim to independence or 'masterlessness' is vital to the idea of the modern state. States claim to be 'constitutionally insular', according to Alan James (1986: 25) – that is, they deny being subject to any superior authority and object to external interference. This notion of constitutional insularity was given its clearest modern formulation by Swiss lawyer and diplomat Emer de Vattel (1714–67), who described states as 'free, independent and equal' (Vattel 2008 [1758]: 74–5). As free and independent entities, states have the right to determine their own interests and policies, and to enjoy this liberty free of external interference. Vattel added another qualification that remains central to modern conceptions of international society (see [Chapter 19](#)): all states, irrespective of strength or weakness, are formally equal and possess the same rights and duties. 'A dwarf,' he said by way of analogy, 'is as much a man as a giant' (2008: 75). While emphasising the external independence of states, however, neither Hobbes nor Vattel believed international relations to be entirely bereft of rules (see [Box 11.3](#)).

### **Box 11.3: Discussion points**

#### **Sovereignty versus international law**

Does state sovereignty imply a rejection of [international law](#)? The answer is no; sovereign states acquire their rights in relation to evolving international rules and norms. States may sometimes ignore and indeed breach international law, but international law has been built up around

states. It is historically a law of and for sovereign states, one that elaborates their rights and obligations (see [Chapter 18](#)).

### **Historical origins of the idea of state sovereignty**

Next let us consider how and why the sovereign state emerged as the resolution to sixteenth-and seventeenth-century political problems. The idea of the sovereign state proposed by Bodin and Hobbes was meant to be a solution to the religious conflict that was tearing European societies apart. Fiercely intolerant religious factions had, since the sixteenth century, generated a crisis of authority that was a clash not only between Christianities, but between civil and religious authority. Did ultimate authority lie with the Church or with civil government? Should governments foster the spiritual salvation of individuals in the afterlife or ensure peace and security here on Earth? If religious zealots wanted to subordinate politics to religion, Bodin and Hobbes wanted to ‘de-theologise’ politics by erecting a state that would stand outside theological disputes and eschew the moral absolutes that fuelled confessional conflict. Its purpose was not to secure everlasting life for its citizens’ souls, but to ensure civil peace and security.

The principle of sovereignty established a new basis on which to conduct politics, displacing the Medieval mosaic of fractured lines of power, authority and allegiance. Politics was now organised along exclusionary lines; the sovereign state came to embody the modern conception of politics, where authority, society and territory were coterminous. The jurisdiction of a political authority, and its related claim to the legitimate instruments of violence, was coextensive with the geographical limits of a society. The notion of sovereignty thus concentrated social, military, economic, political and legal life around a

single site of governance, whether power and authority vested in a prince or in parliament – that is, whether dynastic or popular sovereignty prevailed.

Even though sovereignty was expressed with such precision by Bodin and Hobbes, it remains a contentious concept to this day. Precisely which rights or prerogatives flow from sovereignty is not just historically variable but also politically contested. Rulers may give the impression that sovereignty is a licence to do anything they please, but this is far from the truth. Not only are rulers subject to national constitutions, but state sovereignty has always been governed by international rules and [norms](#), and is conditional upon international recognition (see [Box 11.3](#)) (Bull [1977](#); Reus-Smit [1999](#)).

## **The triumph of the sovereign state: State-building as war-making**

### **The rise of the modern state**

This section outlines briefly the historical process by which the modern state emerged. It is important to recall the political and military contexts – both European and global. The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were ravaged by pan-European civil and religious wars, trade wars on the high seas and wars of conquest and assimilation in the New World. [War](#) was endemic during this period of European history. For example, in the years between 1555 (the Treaty of Augsburg) and 1648 (the Peace of [Westphalia](#)), there were 112 wars in Europe, working out at an average of 1.25 per year (Luard [1986](#): 35). This violence was intensified by the ‘military [revolution](#)’ underway in Europe at the time. Armies grew considerably in size, as did the cost of weaponry and equipment. The increasing length and intensity of armed conflict, as siege

warfare evolved, also added to the costs of war, dramatically increasing the financial burden placed on states.

European rulers could not avoid war; they were, it seems, drawn inexorably into it. Consequently, states were increasingly being fashioned as 'war machines' in order to respond more effectively to the geopolitical situation that prevailed at the time. As we shall see, an effective response required an overhaul of the state's administrative, financial and political organisation in order to monopolise (and pay for) the instruments of violence under a single unrivalled authority.

Historical sociologists have drawn attention to the close connection between state-building and organised violence. Tilly's ([1975](#): 42) pithy statement that 'War made the state, and the state made war' captures the point nicely. The shift from feudal and other forms of pre-modern state grew out of the heightening demands of warfare, which in turn consolidated the state. The more centralised absolutist state that replaced the feudal one had the capacity not just to raise sufficient finance for growing military expenditure, but also to reorganise and manage the military more efficiently.

In the sixteenth century, new methods of bookkeeping and collecting statistics were invented, allowing states to monitor and intrude in the lives of their populations more intensively and extensively. Such knowledge was to prove crucial in the state-building process: it laid the basis for absolutist states to develop and maintain formal systems of regular taxation, and provided state rulers with information about the economic productivity of their populations. Previously, taxes were raised in an ad hoc manner only when required – often after war had already commenced. With the establishment of regular taxation, states were able to ensure a steady supply of funds to fuel military expenditure in times of war and peace. From the seventeenth century on, states needed a constant supply of finance to prepare for endless wars (Mann [1986](#): 453). Tilly

([1985](#): 180) refers to the continuous increase in levels of finance as the ‘ratchet effect’, whereby public revenue and expenditure levels rose abruptly during wars, setting progressively higher floors beneath which peacetime levels of military financing never dropped.

A significant factor in the rising costs was the ‘military revolution’ of the seventeenth century. Advances in technology and weaponry, innovations in military tactics and strategy, heightened organisation of military forces, the introduction of standing armed forces, the growth in size of the armed forces relative to the population and the escalating costs of maintaining maritime forces all ensured that military expenditure would remain just as high in times of peace as in war (Mann [1986](#): 455). The management of relevant fiscal resources thus became crucial to the rise of the absolutist state and its successor, the modern state. There are two points to note here. First, systematic revenue-raising depended on developing administrative capabilities at the centre of the state. Second, development of the absolutist state’s revenue-raising and administrative capabilities was crucial to its monopolisation of coercive means. The upshot was that states became better able to extend their capacity to ‘monitor, control and monopolise the effective means of violence’ (Tilly [1992](#): 68), and thereby intensify their rule.

But what drove this monopolisation process? Historical sociologists largely agree here with realists and with Benno Teschke’s [Marxism](#). They all agree that the principal cause of this process lies in geopolitical pressures generated by war. In order to protect themselves against external aggression, states constantly had to prepare for war. The [balance of power](#), [alliance](#)-formation, [diplomacy](#) and military build-ups were therefore essential conditions in the rise of the absolutist state. As Skocpol ([1979](#): 30) explains, ‘geopolitical environments create tasks and opportunities for states and place limits on their capacities to cope with either external or internal crises’. Mann ([1986](#): 490) agrees with the

primacy accorded to the external dimension. He argues, 'The growth of the modern state ... is explained primarily not in domestic terms but in terms of geopolitical relations of violence.'

### **Disarming competing powers**

Notwithstanding the growth of global terrorism in the twenty-first century, we still tend to think of sovereign states as the exclusive holders of the legitimate instruments of force. But as Janice Thomson ([1994](#)) points out, this was not always the case. It was the result of long historical processes that eventually disarmed [non-state actors](#) so that control over the domestic and international employment of force would be concentrated in the sovereign state. This meant that privateers and merchant shipping companies operating private seafaring vessels charged with the right to wage war, pirates who used force without any official sanction and mercenaries who traipsed from war to war for a pay cheque would no longer be tolerated as legitimate bearers of arms. Instead, the sovereign state became the exclusive bearer of the instruments of force as privateers, merchant companies and mercenaries were stripped of their right to bear arms against, or in competition with, states (Thomson [1994](#)). The modern state was therefore the end-product of the 'long and bloody struggle by state-builders to extract coercive capabilities from other individuals, groups, and organisations within their territory' ([1994](#): 3).

An argument that complements the history narrated by Thomson is to be found in the work of Hendrik Spruyt ([1994](#)). He explains how the sovereign state became the [constitutive](#) organising principle of the [international system](#) by displacing and excluding alternative forms of state. He explains why alternatives to the sovereign state, such as feudal, city-league and city-state systems, failed to

become the dominant forms of political organisation as Europe shifted from the Medieval to the modern system of states.

Spruyt ([1994](#): 3) concurs with Thomson that the principle of sovereignty ‘altered the structure of the international system by basing political authority on the principle of territorial exclusivity’. He says the triumph of state sovereignty as a constitutive principle was the result of three things: first, its scale afforded greater administrative and organisational efficiency than small city-states and loosely integrated empires; second, it offered a more effective means of organising the external relations of states; and third, it successfully eliminated non-territorial, feudal systems of governance.

The sovereign state is a distinctively modern resolution of political life that emerged after long and bloody battles over power and authority, and that has now been globalised as a political form. The globalisation of the sovereign state is a complex story of political, commercial and colonial interaction between European and non-European powers. In some cases – for example, India – post-colonial governments enthusiastically embraced European conceptions of statehood after achieving independence (see Kaviraj [2005](#)); in other cases – for example indigenous peoples in the context of settler colonialism – struggles for independence have continued against coercively imposed statehood (Reynolds [1996](#); Tully [1995](#)) (see [Box 11.4](#)).

#### **Box 11.4:** Discussion points

##### **Hobbes and Australia’s origins**

Right at the end of *Leviathan*, his powerful attempt to justify the sovereign state, Hobbes ([1968](#): 722) concedes that ‘there is scarce a Commonwealth in the world, whose beginnings can in conscience be justified’. This applies with especial relevance to Australia. The

continent now called Australia has been occupied by Aboriginal peoples for some 60 000 years. In 1788, it was settled by the British under the presumption of what subsequently became known as *terra nullius*, the notion that the land was unowned and unoccupied. Australia's pre-eminent historian of colonisation and settlement, Henry Reynolds ([1987](#), [1996](#)), argues that the British (and Europeans more generally) viewed lands like Australia as lacking political authority, bereft of recognisable legal codes, and therefore open to annexation. Colonisation was deemed legitimate because the continent appeared to be empty and unowned. This was, of course, false, as demonstrated by the sporadic frontier violence that was instrumental in dispossessing Aboriginal peoples of their lands. State-building in Australia was thus no different from state-building anywhere else – it depended on violence.

The notion of *terra nullius* has since been repudiated by the Australian High Court in the 1992 *Mabo* judgment (see Reynolds [1996](#): Chapter 1). The court determined that the land was indeed occupied and owned by Aboriginal people and that 'native title' was not extinguished by British settlement and dispossession. However, the court did not, and could not, rule on the question of sovereignty. Nevertheless, the *Mabo* judgment shook Australia's foundations – if only momentarily. It is worth reflecting on Hobbes' observation in relation to Australia's eighteenth-century beginnings: can it be justified in good conscience? What are the moral and political implications of accepting or rejecting Hobbes' observation?

One of the most important aspects of the modern state is its spatial configuration. Compared with the fragmented political order of the Medieval world or loose political formation of empires, the modern world is based on integrated, homogeneous political spaces ruled by a single and exclusive authority in the interests of a unified national society. By virtue of the role played by war and the monopolisation of legitimate violence, the rise of the modern state is inseparable from violence, including the violence exacted through Europe's colonial expansion (Keal [2003](#); Keene [2002](#)). To this day, struggles to achieve statehood continue to involve some measure of violence, but that is the political risk of declaring independence from foreign or imperial rule (see [Box 11.5](#)).

**Box 11.5:** Discussion points

**Declarations of independence: The birth of new states**

Declarations of independence are, as David Armitage ([2007](#): 17) reminds us, documents of 'state-making'. They announce 'the emergence of new states ... [marking] the transition from subordination within an empire to independence alongside other states' ([2007](#): 104).

Since the US Declaration of Independence (1776), there have been several 'waves' of what we might call 'state natality' (the birth of states):

- the early nineteenth-century declarations of independence in Central and South America (including Haiti 1804, Colombia 1810, Venezuela 1811, Mexico 1813 and Argentina 1816)
- the collapse of major Eurasian land empires (Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian) after the Great War

- decolonisation after World War II, especially as the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese empires retreated from Asia and Africa in the face of anti-colonial struggles and the emerging norm of [self-determination](#)
- post-[Cold War](#) dissolution of multinational empires and states (the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia).

There are a handful of new states, including Eritrea (1993), Palau (1994), East Timor (2002), Montenegro (2006), and South Sudan (2011), and a number of ‘aspiring’ sovereign states, including Palestine and Kosovo, among others. Scotland in the United Kingdom and Quebec in Canada have also contended with aspirations to become independent states.

## Whither the sovereign state?

This final section briefly surveys arguments about the future of the sovereign state. In particular, it focuses on debates surrounding globalisation’s impact on and [normative](#) critiques of the sovereign state. First, though, it elaborates on the various monopoly powers claimed by modern states, since many of the debates revolve around the viability and moral defensibility of these monopolies.

The modern state is built on a series of monopolies. Aside from coercion, within their jurisdictions modern states claim a monopoly right to:

- national economic management
- law-making

- international representation
- border control, and
- political loyalty.

It is important to recall here the distinction between authority and control. Although they may aspire to exercise full control over these issue areas, states will never succeed entirely. They will, however, retain the authority to decide matters in these areas inside their territories.

Ever since globalisation became a hot topic, claims have been made about the demise of the sovereign state (see [Chapter 28](#)). ‘Hyperglobalisationists’ tend to see globalisation as a powerful economic and technological force hollowing out the state, depriving it of power over these monopolies. This is almost certainly an exaggeration, since the state retains power and, more importantly, authority, over many vital issues, including aspects of globalisation itself, as both ‘sceptics’ and ‘transformationalists’ agree. But whereas sceptics tend to see globalisation as little more than a myth concocted primarily by Western states to promote [neoliberal](#) economic policy agendas, transformationalists tend to accept that some human activities have been ‘deterritorialised’ – that is, they increasingly take place on a global social plane unmoored from territoriality. The state is not a powerless victim of globalisation so much as one of its vehicles. But no matter how real or powerful globalisation is, the modern state still retains authority (if not control) over how global processes affect its monopoly powers.

Globalisation affects different states in different ways. For example, developing countries are not able to capitalise on all of globalisation’s purported benefits in the same way as are developed ones. Moreover, some scholars argue that globalisation adversely affects many developing countries by disempowering them or compelling them to adopt harsh austerity measures favoured by the West (see [Chapters 27](#) and [28](#)). In some instances this may have

contributed to the proliferation of what many refer to as ‘[failed states](#)’ (see [Chapter 30](#)). Such states no longer successfully claim the various monopolies over their jurisdiction, as warlords, organised criminal networks or insurgents exert control, and sometimes authority, over the legitimate government. The rise of the [Islamic State \(IS\)](#) in Iraq and Syria is a reminder of the connections between war and state-building. The US-led ‘War on Terror’ dislodged the Iraqi government, and civil war destabilised the Syrian government, creating failed states and ripe conditions for jihadist state-building efforts (to build a new caliphate) in the region (see Byman [2016](#); Phillips [2014](#)).

[Cosmopolitans](#) like Andrew Linklater argue that the sovereign form of state fosters domination and exclusion. In monopolising so many dimensions of politics, the modern state has, through its coercive instruments, participated in the reproduction of violent practices and unjust structures. Other scholars such as R.B.J. Walker ([1993](#)) and David Campbell ([1998](#)) have delivered powerful critiques of sovereign practices with [postmodern](#) theories (see [Chapter 6](#)). The purpose of these critical accounts of the modern state is to challenge the supposition that authority, territory and community must be coterminous. The hope is that this will allow for freer, less exclusivist, more democratic forms of political society.

Cosmopolitans have explored forms of citizenship and ‘post-sovereign’ statehood that widen moral and political community beyond national–territorial borders. Linklater ([1998](#)) and David Held ([1998](#)), for example, have considered the potential of globalisation to strengthen [democracy](#) within and extend it between states. This, they believe, would give voice to minorities traditionally marginalised within sovereign states, and also compel states to give greater consideration to how their decisions impact on outsiders. In Linklater’s view, modern states have consistently de-emphasised duties to the community of humankind. But he also believes there are progressive tendencies built into states

that may promote normative commitments by refusing to see territorial boundaries as morally and politically decisive. His normative vision questions the monopolising tendencies of the modern state, while exploring potentials to share power and authority among different levels of governance: local, national, regional and global. This would necessarily de-emphasise the modern state's persistent distinction between insiders (citizens) and outsiders (foreigners), allowing for a politics that takes seriously moral and political responsibilities to all human beings.

## **Conclusion**

As the final section shows, there are material and normative reasons for questioning the suitability of the sovereign state in contemporary international relations. This should not be surprising, given that the sovereign state emerged as a response to a particular set of issues in the aftermath of Medieval Europe. Insofar as the social, political and economic context has changed over the last four centuries, the sovereign form of state, a product of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, may have outlived its usefulness. In truth, it is too soon to say, not least because the state has shown remarkable adaptability in the face of changing circumstances, continues to attract aspirants and remains the most viable – if flawed – means for organising political society. What we can say is that vigorous debates will continue about the modern state's purpose and effectiveness in a changing world.

## **Discussion questions**

### **11.1 What makes a state sovereign?**

**11.2** Why did the modern state triumph over other forms of political organisation?

**11.3** Compare and contrast the modern world of states with its Medieval predecessor.

**11.4** How, if at all, is state sovereignty affected by globalisation?

**11.5** What are the moral and political advantages and disadvantages of the modern state?

**11.6** According to what set of criteria should new states be admitted into international society?

### *Further reading*

Armitage, David 2007, *The Declaration of Independence: A global history*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. *A brilliant historical and theoretical account of how declarations of independence have shaped modern international order.*

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Creveld, Martin van 1999, *The rise and decline of the state*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An excellent historical account of the rise and evolution of the modern state.*

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Hinsley, F.H. 1986, *Sovereignty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An indispensable classic account of the sovereign state's origins and evolution.*

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Krasner, Stephen 1999, *Sovereignty: Organized hypocrisy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *A stimulating and engaging analysis of sovereignty from a realist perspective.*

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Peterson, V. Spike (ed.) 1992, *Gendered states: Feminist (re)visions of international relations theory*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. *A useful collection of essays on the state and international relations by feminist scholars.*

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Skinner, Quentin and Kalmo, Hent (eds) 2010, *Sovereignty in fragments: The past, present and future of a contested concept*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An interesting collection of essays by scholars from IR, political philosophy, international law and the history of political thought.*

12

# Nations and nationalism



**Gavin Mount**

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## Introduction

While [nations](#) and [nationalism](#) have become the dominant mode of ascribing political culture in world politics, understanding the meaning and political importance of these terms has been a notoriously challenging task. One survey of concepts in International Relations (IR) said of the term '[national interest](#)' that it was 'the most vague and therefore easily used and abused'; of nationalism, that 'there is a lack of consensus about what it is and why it has

maintained such a firm hold over so much of the world's population'; and that 'Nations and states seem identical but they are not' (Griffiths and O'Callaghan [2002](#): 202–13). The discussion that follows will survey debates on nation and nationalism around four broad questions. The first concerns debates around terminology and their contemporary relevance for the study of IR. The second relates to questions of nation formation and the origins of nationalism, particularly in terms of how it came to shape modern states and [international society](#). The third explores how the ideas of nations and nationalism have been important in IR theory and practice. The fourth section briefly considers the rise of 'new nationalism' in contemporary world politics.

As a [discipline](#), IR has made a surprisingly modest contribution to this scholarship (see Carr [1945](#); Hinsley [1973](#); Mayall [1990](#); Breuilly [2013](#)). Nationalism is often not addressed explicitly, but it has a significant tacit presence in all of the major schools of thought in the discipline. Consequently, mainstream IR theories have compounded some of the analytical problems associated with understanding nationalism. For example, classical [realists](#) have tended to conflate nation and state into the concept of 'national interest', while [liberal](#) and [Marxist](#) theorists have been internally conflicted over the merits of nationalism versus its potential to undermine ideals of internationalism. The study of nationalism should be a central consideration for any analysis of the major issues in contemporary global politics because taking questions of national interest, values and identity seriously is one way of invoking the idea that culture and 'people' matter.

## **Terminological debates**

The terms ‘nation’, ‘nationality’ and ‘nationalism’ are all notoriously difficult to define. Scholars disagree on whether the most important characteristic of a nation should be its physical, spiritual or social characteristics; whether it is ancient or modern; whether it is imagined or real; and whether or not it is separate from the [state](#) (see [Box 12.1](#)). As political ideologies, nationalisms have been characterised as democratic or authoritarian, imperial or anti-imperial, forward-looking or backward-looking, stateled or state-seeking, and pre-modern or [postmodern](#). In fact, the only thing that scholars of nations and nationalism seem to agree upon is that the concepts are ‘impossibly fuzzy’ (Kamenka [1975](#): 3) and that attempts to arrive at a coherent universal definition of these words are at best ‘foolish’ or at worst ‘a bootless exercise of definitional imperialism’ (Nash [1989](#): 125; see also Connor [1994](#); Seton-Watson [1977](#)).

### **Box 12.1 Terminology**

#### **Nations and nationalism**

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present.

(Renan 1996 [1882]: 52)

[A nation] is an imagined political community ... because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

(Anderson [1991](#): 6)

[Nationalism] is a very distinctive species of patriotism, and one which becomes pervasive and dominant only under certain social conditions which in fact prevail in the modern world, and nowhere else.

(Gellner [1983](#): 183)

Nationalism has been both cause and effect of the great reorganizations of political space that framed the ‘short twentieth century’.

(Brubaker [1996](#): 4)

Regardless of whether academics can define the terms, nationalism is a real force in the sense that it has had, and continues to have, a very real impact on the lives of millions of people throughout the world. There are at least four main reasons why the concept seems to be so resistant to definition.

The first point of confusion is the conflation of the terms ‘state’ and ‘nation’. Whereas a state refers to the internationally recognised political institution made up of a population, a territory and a government capable of entering into relations with other states (see [Chapter 11](#)), a nation can broadly be defined as ‘a named human community connected to a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a distinct public culture, and common laws and customs for all members’ (Smith [2010](#): 13). While there are similarities between these two entities – both refer to human groups, and have a geography and a set of binding institutions – it is the subtleties that separate them.

Defining human groups as ‘populations’ versus ‘communities’ implies a distinction in terms of the formal categorisation of the collectivity as an empirically known and legally constituted entity. While the term ‘peoples’ is often used in international law, it is a very malleable concept. Distinctions between formally recognised ‘territory’ and a more symbolic concept of ‘homeland’ refer to different types of relationships between people and place. One is a notion of formal borders and control; the other is one of attachment and belonging. State archives, libraries, museums and memorials express different means of forging memory from the myths, folklore, art and traditions transmitted through culture. State institutions that facilitate a formal government recognised by others are different from the customs and laws of a nation, which tend to be more introspectively binding to the community.

A second reason for the confusion is that, while nationalism is a mass phenomenon, its formal expression is defined and refined by elites. Vernacular understandings of what it means to belong to a national identity draw upon a range of essentially contested and changeable cultural ideas and practices. In formal terms, however, nationality is presented in more tangible ways through its associations with criteria for citizenship, the dominant symbols such as anthems, flags, currency, public holidays or monuments, and the narratives of national memory. On this issue of elite versus mass views of nationalism, a seasoned scholar such as Eric Hobsbawm ([1997](#): 11) concludes that ‘official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what it is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters’.

Third, nationalist ideology seeks to be simultaneously exceptionalist and universalist. As Tzvetan Todorov ([1993](#): 93) notes, nationalism is ‘paradoxical because while it is a perspective inherently based upon the centrality of one cultural perspective, it espouses a universal doctrine of humanity’. State-seeking national movements in particular seek recognition by the international

community as having a legitimate claim to [self-determination](#): ‘the right for peoples to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development’ (*International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, Art. 1.1). A good example of this is the case of the East Timorese who, for twenty-five years, sought recognition for their claim of self-determination until Timor Leste was finally recognised, through the [United Nations](#), by the former colonial powers of Indonesia and Portugal in 1999. More recently, the long-standing and extremely violent struggle in Sudan underwent a surprisingly peaceful referendum process, creating the world’s newest nation-state.

Fourth, while nations claim to have objective geographical, historical and social ties, it appears that the subjective or imagined qualities are the most important. Empirical social science research must grapple with the paradox that, while objective evidence of national and ethnic identity may be difficult to document, the members of these groups have very real perceptions that these ties are part of their physical, psychological, sociological and political experience in everyday life. Max Weber expressed this paradox when he observed that even though the idea of nation was an ‘entirely ambiguous’ empirical category, it was ‘a community of sentiment that would most adequately manifest itself in a state’ (Smith [1983](#): 25, 32).

What the above observations suggest is that just because an idea is vague and difficult to define does not mean that it lacks any substantial force as a concept. On the contrary, the invented character of national symbols and arguments on the national interest can increase the enthusiasm of patriots for sacrificing their lives ‘with the satisfaction of serving eternal truth’, because men ‘don’t allow themselves to be killed for their interests; they allow themselves to be killed for their passions’ (Connor [2004](#): 32, 206). Even faced with rational counter-arguments, the default nationalist position is invoked in the form of ‘my

country right or wrong’. As George Orwell ([1945](#)) reflected: ‘Every nationalist is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also – since he is conscious of serving something bigger than himself – unshakeably certain of being in the right.’

## **How nationalism shaped modern states and international society**

The idea of *nation* has a long lineage in Western political thought. The Ancient Greeks referred to the deep relationship between people and place as *patras*, much as we would use the term ‘patriotism’ today; the Romans used *natio* to describe peoples such as the Germans and the Britons who inhabited the outer provinces of the empire, and there are several references to the term in the Bible as God’s chosen people – *And I will make of thee a great nation* (Genesis 12: 2; Tonkin et al. [1989](#)). The contemporary uses of ‘nation’, ‘nationality’ and ‘nationalism’ have a different meaning associated with state authority in the conjoined term ‘nation-state’. All these terms prevail in modern political thought. A nation can simultaneously be understood to be a deep ancient cultural community connected to a homeland, a problematic regional identity and a spiritual or sanctified political community. From an IR perspective, we must add one more important meaning. To manage relations with frontier peoples, the Romans developed a set of principles called *jus gentium* (law of nations), which would leave an important legacy in international law. These principles regulated the rules of [peace](#) and [war](#), and negotiated territorial boundaries.

The greatest debate in nationalism studies concerns the relationship between nationalism and modernity (see [Box 12.2](#)). Arguably the strongest appeal of national identity is that it provides its members with a profound sense

of continuity with the past, but nationalism is also understood to be a distinctly modern phenomenon. Three schools of thought in nationalism studies – primordial, perennial and modernist – offer alternative perspectives on the relationship between nationalism and modernity (see [Box 12.2](#)).

### **Box 12.2** Discussion points

#### **The modernity of nations? Three schools of thought**

***Primordialists***, such as Clifford Geertz and Walker Connor, argue that national identity draws upon deep affective ties through symbols and traditions which give national and ethnic identity its pre-given, organic character. The attachment seems to ‘flow from a sensual or natural – some would say spiritual – affinity’ (Connor [1994](#); Geertz [1963](#)).

***Perennialists***, such as Anthony Smith, acknowledge the deep ethnosymbolic character of national identity but argue that it acquires different characteristics in the modern context (Smith [1986](#)).

***Modernists***, such as Ernest Gellner and Liah Greenfeld, argue that nationalism is a ‘functional component’ of modernisation or even ‘the blueprint’ of a distinctly modern consciousness (Greenfeld [2006](#): 204). While some modernists believe this identity was formed as early as the sixteenth-century Reformation (Greenfeld [1992](#); Hastings [1997](#)), others believe the process occurred in the eighteenth century and was brought about by the demands of the Industrial Revolution (Gellner [1983](#); Hobsbawm [1997](#)).

Notwithstanding these important theoretical debates, there is a broad consensus among nationalism scholars that the events of the American and French Revolutions formalised the idea of national or popular [sovereignty](#) in the late eighteenth century. Both the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen leave no doubt that ‘the people’ are the only legitimate foundation for sovereign statehood (see [Box 12.3](#)). National consciousness may claim a heritage that extends before this revolutionary period in the late eighteenth century, but the formal normative shift from dynastic to popular sovereignty is widely regarded as having occurred during this period (Wight [1977](#): Chapter 6; Hinsley [1973](#); Mayall [1990](#)).

### **Box 12.3** Discussion points

#### **The American and French Revolutions**

Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it ...

(Declaration of Independence, United States of America, 1776)

The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.

(Article 3 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, National Assembly of France, 1789)

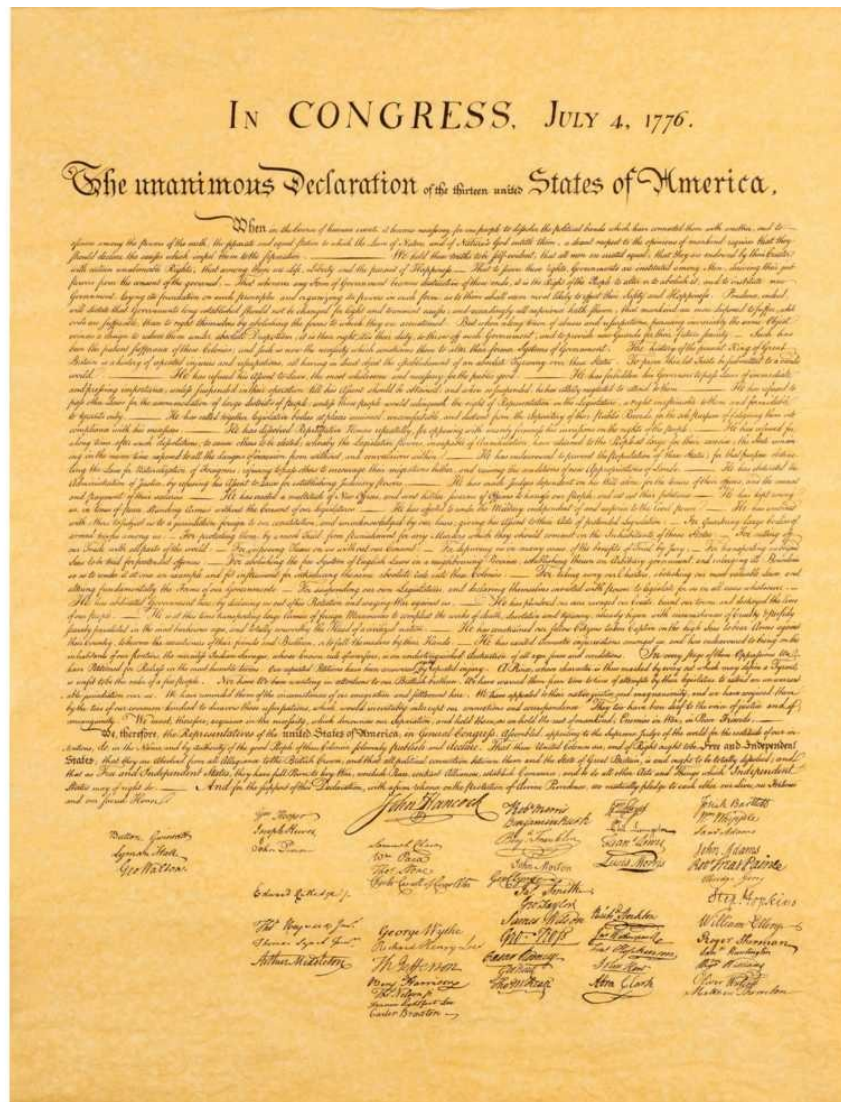


Figure 12.1 The US Declaration of Independence

Some of the most interesting research on nation formation has examined the way that nationalism came to replace religion as the dominant form of political culture, and the special role that language has played in constructing this identity.

The concept of civil religion as a foundation for national identity has a long history in social and political thought. Drawing upon early work by Rousseau,

Comte, Durkheim and Max Weber, contemporary scholars (Hayes [1960](#); Bell [1960](#); Bellah [1970](#); Chatterjee [1993](#)) have all examined the proposition that in replacing religion as the dominant means of defining political culture, nationalism reproduces, and is infused by, many of the characteristics of religious order (Smith [2000](#)). As Robert Bellah puts it, nationalism underwent a process of ‘sanctification’. Even if a civil religion is not aligned to a particular church or to a particular supernatural being, it is a collection of beliefs, symbols and rituals that sanctifies the national community and confers a transcendental purpose on the political process (see Santiago [2009](#)).

In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson ([1991](#)) argues that nationalism emerged as a result of the link between print technology and the emergence of a modern consumer class. Together, these processes created a phenomenon called print capitalism, which enabled a common, or vernacular, language to disseminate through the masses. The printing press enabled the mass consumption of pamphlets, newspapers and novels in a way that literally enforced a common vernacular on the people. Through this process, smaller groups previously separated by differences in dialect, religion or region were bound together into what Anderson described as ‘imagined communities’.

In his seminal work, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, Eugen Weber ([1976](#)) demonstrates how national cohesion – and indeed the prevalence of the French language – was quite weak among the French peasantry throughout much of the nineteenth century. It was not until the 1880s that the state more effectively integrated language and identity through public ‘agencies of change’, such as the transport infrastructure, the military, schools and the church. Control of languages remains a fundamentally important mechanism and symbol of state authority. It is manifested in constitutional decrees and public services such as health and education systems. It is also worth noting that the establishment and spread of national language can be intensely destructive of minority ethnic

identity. By one estimation, the spread of global languages and vigorous defence of national languages is causing the ‘language death’ of as many as half of the world’s six thousand languages (Crystal [2000](#)).

It can be argued that nationalism was integral to the emergence of modern diplomacy. Following the defeat of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the sixteenth-century doctrine of *cuius regio eius religio* (whose region, his religion) was adapted to the norm of *cuius regio eius natio* (whose region, his nation). The emergence of this new norm created modern nation-states where it was broadly understood that sovereignty now rested neither with popes nor with princes, but rather with the people. In this sense, nationalism formalised a *humanist* premise in international society by insisting that the source of legitimacy of states could only be built upon the representation and protection of peoples imbued with individual [human rights](#) and responsibilities.

As noted above (see [Box 12.3](#)), these ideas were also forged in the context of revolutionary warfare. In the following centuries, nationalism continued to be deeply implicated in the deaths and forced displacement of millions. Both stateled and state-seeking nationalists have been prepared to kill others and sacrifice themselves for the ideal of protecting or acquiring political independence for their people. While Western Europe experienced an ‘age of nationalism’ during the nineteenth century, it would be another century before the norm of self-determination began to be accepted as a universal right for all peoples across the globe.

In the early twentieth century, self-determination was embedded within Woodrow Wilson’s proposal for a League of Nations which advocated that politically demarcated territories should contain peoples who were racially, linguistically or culturally homogeneous (Preece [1997](#)). With the advent of the United Nations following World War II, self-determination of colonial peoples became a more developed norm, propelling a process of [decolonisation](#) that

brought about the [emancipation](#) of millions of non-European peoples and allowed for a fundamental expansion of international society (Bull and Watson [1984](#); see also [Chapter 19](#)). The struggle of peoples for self-determination came at a great cost in human life. Independence struggles and post-independence repression caused many millions of deaths throughout the [Cold War](#) period.

Nationalist struggles continued to be highly significant in the post-Cold War period. Indeed, the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed widespread ethno-nationalist struggles, particularly in the Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa (Connor [1994](#)). Much of the commentary on ethno-national struggle during this period was alarmist, characterising the phenomenon as a fragmenting threat to regional and international stability (Mount [2000](#), [2010](#)). While the international community failed to prevent tragic genocides such as those in Rwanda and Srebrenica, the longer term response of international society has been to develop norms to protect minority peoples (Preece [2005](#)). Even the norms relating to indigenous peoples have been more comprehensively addressed in a formal sense of signing ‘treaties’ and through such international instruments as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Keal [2003](#)). The progressive ideal of self-determination remains one of the most important principles in contemporary international society.

## **Understanding nations and nationalism in International Relations**

Inquiries into the nature of nations and nationalism have been a traditional area of study in IR, but the modern discipline has tended to treat the subject tacitly rather than explicitly. Most contemporary scholarship on the subject occurs in the disciplines of sociology, history, political theory and anthropology.

Moreover, especially since the end of World War II, the field of IR has been engaged in an act of collective wishful thinking, anticipating the demise of nationalism. This was not always the case.

A century ago, a student of international affairs could expect a curriculum of study to begin with the study of nations; their role in shaping international society; their potential to cause war; and the significance of their main components – descent, geography, language and religion (see Moon [1925](#)). For the first half of the twentieth century, it would continue to be normal for the study of our discipline to begin in this way. A popular theme found in early IR textbooks was the ‘Family’, ‘Society’ or ‘World’ of Nations (see Bailey [1932](#); Burns [1915](#); Lawrence [1919](#); Newfang [1924](#); Potter [1929](#)). The study of nations was part of an imperial mindset that required diplomats and colonial administrators to have an understanding of cultural differences between ‘tribal’ peoples and ‘civilised’ society. The focus was also typically very legalistic but, even so, there was a conscious effort to understand the politics of cultural dynamics of ‘peoples’. For example, IR scholars in the 1930s examining the ‘domestic, religious and national problems’ in Iraq were interested in, and aware of, the ‘unceasing conflict between the Sunnis and the Shia’ (Carpenter [1933](#): 375).

In the aftermath of the Great Depression, and on the eve of World War II, the family of nations was breaking up, and the civilised ideals of an international society were not being upheld or enforced. Emblematically, as the League of Nations appeared doomed to collapse, a more despairing tone began to emerge. The noble and *civilised* idea that nationalism ‘should claim not its own aggrandisement, but its right to serve humanity as a distinct group’ (Mazzini, cited in Burns [1915](#): 11) seemed to be losing traction. Liberals such as Norman Angell observed that the idea of nationalism was being distorted into narrow-spirited and parochial forms of militarism, Hitlerism and Balkanisation (the

breakup of a region or state into smaller, often hostile, ethnic or national groupings). Even newly formed nations in Europe had ‘repudiated the principle of nationality’ (Angell [1932](#): 255). The rise of this un-international nationalism was held to account as the root cause of the collapse of the international order (Keeton [1939](#)).

Hans Kohn’s [1944](#) study, *The Idea of Nationalism*, explained the problem in terms of a conflict between ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nationalisms. Kohn argued that countries that defined national membership on the basis of ‘blood’ were more conflict-prone than those based on ‘soil’. Improving citizenship laws would encourage greater loyalty to political institutions rather than one’s ethnic community. Kohn’s analysis is still regarded as highly pertinent in contemporary IR. In particular, it has been used to propose democratic solutions to avoid problems such as [ethnic cleansing](#) (Brubaker [1996](#); Snyder [2000](#)).

Another important contribution to current understandings of nationalism was made by E.H. Carr in his [1945](#) publication, *Nationalism and After*, which celebrated the achievements of the welfare state while repudiating pernicious nationalism for its exclusionary treatment of racial and ethnic minorities and as a cause of war. Carr’s hope was that following the devastation of two World Wars, a world *after* nationalism could be constructed – one where more open forms of political community would suppress the inward-looking and exclusionary politics of nationalism. This analysis was recently revisited by [critical theorist](#) Andrew Linklater, who described Carr’s work on nationalism as a significant contribution to resolving the political and moral questions of our epoch (Linklater [1997](#): 321).

For our purposes, it is important to recognise that prior to the end of World War II, the study of nations and nationalism was considered as both the foundation and the most critically topical subject of study in the field. After World War II, there appears to have been a strong desire to understand

international politics through a state-centric lens. The post-war period did not culminate in the demise of nationalism, but IR became consolidated into a profoundly state-centric discipline with a marked 'lack of curiosity about different political identities, including nationalism' (Pettman [1998](#): 149).

The neglect of nationalism as an analytical category has meant that it is quite routine in world politics for the terms 'nation' and 'national' to be used as synonyms for the 'state'. We can observe this in the discipline of IR itself, global institutions such as the United Nations, policy doctrines that appeal to the national interest, armed struggles for recognition of statehood characterised in terms of national independence and even the designation of an individual's legal citizenship status on passports as their nationality. In each of these cases, the term 'nation' refers predominantly to state agency. For instance, the United Nations comprises 193 legally recognised member states, not the estimated 5000 or so distinguishable ethnic groups in the world (Eller [1990](#)).

IR scholars can become very frustrated with this slippage between nation and state, in which the distinction between legal and cultural conceptions of bounded human communities is blurred. Yet it is possible that the uses of 'nation' in these instances are at least partially intentional. After all, the overarching aspiration of the United Nations goes beyond the idea that it is simply 'a club of states' when the preamble to its Charter, echoing the American Declaration of Independence, begins with the phrase, 'We the people of the United Nations'. Similarly, governments and political leaders are astutely aware that references to the nation and national interest are ways of summoning the power of the concept to speak of, and to, the deep cultural attachments of human communities (Wolfers [1952](#)). Internally, citizens can be reassured by justifications of a national security policy framed in terms of defending traditions and a 'way of life'. Externally, a diplomatic statement referring to

another nation intuitively reaches out to the people of a country, not just the political institutions of government.

## **New nationalisms in contemporary world politics**

In recent decades, new forms of nationalism have been emerging at a global level. Major transformative dynamics – notably the financial crisis of 2008, large-scale migration patterns, climate change and disruptive digital technologies – have been implicated significantly in the rise (or return) of nationalism. Politically, these changes have served as inimical elements driving populist, and often xenophobic and economically nationalist, political movements. The unexpected success of the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ presidential campaign are two prominent examples of this effect across the Anglosphere (see *Economist* [2016](#)). Continental Europe has also experienced a rise in new nationalisms. Political attitude surveys reveal that these sentiments are driven primarily by refugee flows that, in turn, have generated anxiety about increased terrorist attacks and limitations on employment (Barber [2016](#); Wike et al. [2016](#)). Bearing these global dynamics in mind, IR scholars can shed light on the accompanying rise of nationalism through an analysis of two prevailing mechanisms of world politics described by Joseph Nye ([2011](#)) as *power transition* and *power diffusion*.

Power transition refers to the shift in global centres of power of the interstate system. Contemporary nationalism has become entangled with the rise (or return) of the non-Western great powers and the disorientating effects that this is having on the Western hegemony (see [Chapter 21](#)). Among all of the great powers, nationalist sentiment has been growing as each of these nation-states renegotiate their positions in the hierarchical structure of world politics. In the

wake of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, US President Barack Obama sought to forestall US decline by advocating a ‘new nationalism’ to restore pride in American jobs (*National Review* [2011](#)). In the same year, China projected its national pride and ‘return’ (Link [2015](#)) as a civilisational power on the occasion of the Beijing Olympics, while Russia asserted its ‘imperialist nationalism’ (Kolstø and Blakkisrud [2016](#)) by occupying Abkazia and South Ossetia. The following year, the Indian general election was won through a strategy of ‘renationalisation’ of the Indian Congress Party while the European Parliament elections saw a growth of conservative reformists. Nationalistic sentiment has continued to be harnessed effectively by the political elite of these great powers to secure their domestic political power base and bolster their international presence. In India, Narendra Modi seized electoral victory in 2014 as the leader of the Hindu nationalist party, the BJP. In Russia, Vladimir Putin consolidated his domestic popular appeal with the annexation of Crimea. In China, President Xi Jinping has pursued an assertive strategy in the South and East China Sea. In Europe, UKIP’s Brexit campaign led a successful referendum campaign to leave the European Union. In the United States, Donald Trump won the 2016 election with his ‘Make America Great Again’ campaign.

In the middle tier of the global hierarchy, the ascendance of non-Western states such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Iran, Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa and Indonesia has also been accompanied by strong nationalist political parties and charismatic leaders. As these new middle powers jostle within a changing hierarchical structure, they have been especially influential in shaping regional politics and pursuing new norms of global governance.

Economic nationalism, xenophobia and a fear of terrorism have all been important domestic political issues and, on the surface, these conservative reformist political parties may appear entirely insular and parochial, but their nationalist rhetoric has also been outward looking in its focus. Not only are these

movements interdependently reacting to global forces; their assertions of protectionism and self-determination can also be seen as proactive expressions seeking global recognition, restoring status and prestige within the world order. Seen from this viewpoint, nationalism of the hegemonic states is consistent with typical great power international behaviour to protect and project power and prestige within their perceived 'natural' spheres of influence.

Another way to understand the mechanisms of power shaping contemporary global politics is the phenomenon of *power diffusion* (Guzzini and Neumann [2012](#)). Power diffusion refers to the transfer of socio-political and economic power away from the orthodox state apparatus towards non-state actors. IR scholars have observed how massively empowering global technologies, combined with political distrust, are leading to the decay of conventional political institutions (Naim [2014](#)) and rendering traditional markers of power obsolete (Nye [2011](#)). Just as the interaction between human communities and the digital environment has opened up new forms of 'subterranean' political movements (Kaldor 2015), sub-national self-determination movements have also harnessed these technologies to assert their claims.

Hailed as the 'third awakening' (Saikal [2014](#)) of the Middle East, the 2011 Arab Spring was one example of how these diffusions of conventional power recalibrated regional and global politics. While ostensibly framed as democratic uprisings, they were also crucially enmeshed with assertions of political Islam, pan-Arab nationalism and reinterpretations of national identity. As one analyst surmised, 'at the heart of the democratization issue in the Middle East is the question of national identity' (Sharp [2006](#): 2). IR scholars have acknowledged how crucially important digital technology was in enabling these rebellions against autocratic states, 'by facilitating the circulation of ideas in national and

global spaces and challenging state monopolies of information' (Dalacoura [2012](#): 68; see also Shirky [2011](#)).

It is tempting to view these new nationalisms under conditions of power transition and diffusion as creating a new ideological divide between nationalists and globalists (Merry [2016](#)). But this tendency to regard nationalism as detached from internationalism has never been conceptually useful, and generally is regarded by nationalism scholars as too simplistic. Put simply, nationalism has always accompanied modernity rather than retreating from it. As Montserrat Guibernau ([1996](#): 138) argues:

Nationalism operated as a legitimizing ideology in the foundation of the nation-state. It defended cultural diversity in the Romantic era, and in the age of globalism it opposes homogenization by articulating a discourse based upon the value of individual cultures and the rights of peoples to decide their political destiny.

## **Conclusion**

Despite predictions of their decline in the face of global change, nations and nationalism remain the dominant means of expressing and defining political culture in twenty-first century international society. Alternative forms of political culture such as empire, monarchy, religion, principality or city have been dominant in the past; and over the past two centuries, nationalism has withstood rival appeals for loyalty orientated around international class, political regions or cosmopolitan ideals. Sub-national tribal and ethnic loyalties have also challenged national authority and loyalty, and in a globally networked information age we may speculate that new digital communities may supersede the appeal of national identity. Yet, despite these alternatives, nationalism has

endured and thrived as the most distinctive means of organising human communities into culturally defined, politically discrete units.

Students of international relations will observe that much of the drama (both tragic and comic) of the IR field emerges out of the context of nationalist passion. The central idea of nationalism – that nations ought to be coterminous with territorial states – endures in our late modern context. Nations that are not so clearly aligned with states also persist beneath (sub-national), across (pan-national) and beyond (virtual nationalities) state boundaries. Interdisciplinary studies confirm that globalism has not eradicated nationalism; rather, national identity has accompanied late modern transformation, and can sometimes provide a nurturing counter-balance to its disruptive effects. The human impulse to express a politics of belonging even among imagined communities has been part of the response to globalisation and a legitimacy crisis that threatens to weaken the relationship of trust between the citizen and the state (Young et al. [2007](#)). We might then expect nationalism to adapt to the challenges of the twenty-first century, and political struggles associated with stateless nations (a form of civil war) or nationless states (a form of tyranny) will continue. While these conflicts will be viewed as a source of fragmentation of the [international system](#), they will also reflect the principle that peoples have a right to freely determine their political status and pursue their own form of economic, social and cultural development – a principle that has been extremely important in shaping and defining international society.

## **Discussion questions**

**12.1** What is a nation and how does it differ from a state?

**12.2** How did nationalism shape international society?

**12.3** Why have language and print capitalism been regarded as important in nation-formation?

**12.4** Are nations secular or sacred?

**12.5** Do you think nationalism is a progressive or regressive force in international relations?

**12.6** If there is a new nationalism in contemporary world politics, what factors are driving it?

**12.7** Will nationalism thrive or decline in the future?

### *Further reading*

Breuilly, John (ed.) 2013, *The Oxford handbook of the history of nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. *This book provides both an historical and contemporary compendium on how nationalism and pan-nationalism manifests in the modern world.*

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Guibernau, Montserrat 1996. *Nationalisms: The nation-state and nationalism in the twentieth century*, London: Polity Press. *A useful overview of key nationalism debates and how they continue to shape the international order.*

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Hutchinson, John and Smith, Anthony (eds) 1994, *Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A valuable collection that includes some classics in the field.*

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Mayall, James 1990, *Nationalism and international society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An important book on the role of nationalism from an IR perspective.*

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Preece, Jennifer Jackson 2005, *Minority rights: Between diversity and*

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*community, Cambridge: Polity Press. An excellent survey of the international politics of racial, religious and linguistic minority rights.*

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Woodwell, Douglas 2007, *Nationalism in international relations: Norms, foreign policy and enmity*, London: Palgrave Macmillan. *This book analyses how the politics of national identity and incompletely realised nation-states influence conflict between states within the international system.*

## **Websites**

The Avalon Project: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/20th.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/20th.asp). *Provides a comprehensive archive of significant documents in international law such as the Covenant of the League of Nations and the United Nations Charter.*

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The Nationalism Project: [www.nationalismproject.org](http://www.nationalismproject.org). *The most comprehensive online collection of summaries and analysis of nationalism studies.*

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Pew Research Center: [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org). *A searchable database on attitudes and trends.*

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Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization: [www.unpo.org](http://www.unpo.org). *A body that was established in 1991 to address the concerns of a wide range of stateless nations and peoples with many different characteristics but who share in common a lack of formal representation at the United Nations.*

13

# Security



**Anthony Burke**

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## Introduction

This chapter introduces the concept and practice of security in international relations. It explores the dilemmas faced by states, individuals and the global community by looking at contemporary crises and disagreements about security; examining how security has been differently defined and focused; and surveying how different theoretical approaches have understood and analysed security.

## **Security and insecurity in the early twenty-first century**

Security has been a major focus of national policy and global governance since the end of World War II, although its origins date back to the Renaissance. In modern political thought, security is associated with the perpetuation of a social order and constellation of power controlled and guaranteed by a sovereign – which, by the twentieth century, meant the government of a sovereign nation-state (Burke [2007a](#); Neocleous [2008](#)). With the rise of the national security state after 1945, security became associated with national defence, deterrence and alliance management, and it also remained concerned with the security of major power empires, trade and investment. However, the devastation of World War II meant that it also became a global concern expressed in the Charter of the United Nations, which in Article I declared that its primary purpose was to ‘maintain international peace and security’ and ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war’; it therefore established major organs such as the Security Council and General Assembly. Over the subsequent half-century, member states have expanded global security governance with new treaties such as the chemical and biological weapons and landmines conventions, the Geneva conventions codifying the law of armed conflict, the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), and new norms such as the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP). This global system based in international law is termed ‘collective security’, and coexists with (and aims to regulate) the national security policies of states and strategic alliances into which they have entered, such as NATO. Another layer of global security governance is provided by regional organisations like the African Union, South America’s Organisation of American States (OAS), East Asia’s ASEAN and Europe’s CSCE.

Major security crises during the post-World War II period of the twentieth century included the development and proliferation of nuclear weapons; superpower confrontation with both nuclear weapons and in many brutal civil wars (such as those in Vietnam, East Timor, El Salvador and Afghanistan, which took the lives of tens of millions); major famines; and genocides and crimes against humanity. While the incidence and severity of interstate war declined, collective security responses were inadequate in resolving many internal conflicts, and this remains a serious problem today. During the 1990s and in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, new international security problems have emerged: ethnic cleansing; pandemics; global economic instability and inequality; massive flows of refugees and forced migrants; gendered sexual violence in conflict; mass-casualty terrorism; cybercrime and war; transnational crime; and climate change and ecological degradation.

Thus a security agenda previously focused on weapons and military conflict has expanded to include a range of new threats and processes, and the political and governance landscape of security has changed in complex ways. At the international level, the elevation of some of these issues onto the security agenda is controversial and contested, and global governance mechanisms have been slow to grapple with them. The UN Security Council, for example, has never passed a resolution about the environment (Burke and Parker [2017](#)). A major 2004 UN report on the evolving collective security agenda acknowledged significant political tensions in this area, saying that

differences of power, wealth and geography do determine what we perceive as the gravest threats to our survival and well-being ... Many people believe that what passes for collective security today is simply a system for protecting the rich and powerful.

They urged the adoption of a new 'consensus [that] we all share responsibility for each other's security' (High Level Panel [2004](#): 10). At the domestic level,

discord is no less evident. Security questions have become more and more politicised, with right-wing parties emphasising Islamist terrorism and refugee flows as major threats, and using them as pretexts to entrench white privilege, attack multiculturalism and marginalise centrist and left-wing political opponents. These processes have been termed ‘security politics’, and critical approaches to security have made them a significant focus of inquiry.

Given this context, security studies and policy practice circle around four thorny questions:

- How broad should the security agenda be, and what are the implications of including specific social challenges or threats within it? Could it inappropriately ‘securitise’ an issue and see it associated with exclusionary and violent policy practices or, alternatively, could it see the broader human and ecological security implications addressed more seriously?
- Do policy-makers understand insecurity as event based or systemic in nature? One new theory – security cosmopolitanism – argues that major insecurities are the product of complex processes that have multiple sources and drivers – often anonymous and systemic – and that achieving insecurity means transforming systems rather than dealing with threats one by one: ‘[It is] not the forced migrant or the massive storm creating insecurity for the nation-state, but the human interaction with the climate system’ (Burke [2013](#): 19).
- What is the correct *referent object* of security? Should we be seeking to secure the state, the region, humanity or planet Earth in its biological diversity? What implications would these choices have for our analysis, policy, and governance approaches?

- What are the ethical implications of choosing a particular approach to security – or indeed a policy or strategic course of action? An emerging genre of scholarship argues that ethical choices and biases are implicated in every approach to security, and cannot be avoided. A key question must be what kind of over-arching ‘good’ we expect security to represent, which incorporates the question of whether security as such is *desirable* (Nyman and Burke [2016](#); Burke et al. [2014](#); Jarvis and Holland [2015](#): 198–221).

## Defining security

Given such disagreement, defining security becomes a highly political matter. Different approaches define security differently, and their definitions incorporate biases about who is to be secured and how. The classical ([realist](#)) definition, advanced by writers such as Walter Lippman and Arnold Wolfers, argues that a nation’s security is determined by its ability to defend itself against threats to ‘core’ or ‘acquired values’, in war if necessary (Baylis [2001](#): 255). Hans Morgenthau ([1973](#)) defines national security as ‘the integrity of the national territory and its institutions’ and says it is ‘the irreducible minimum that diplomacy must defend without compromise’. He does gesture towards an understanding of ‘international’ security dynamics, one taken up by [liberals](#), when he argues that statesmen must try to see problems from the point of view of other nations and diplomacy must seek to make all nations equally secure ([1973](#): 553–5). This contrasts with the views of some realists that security is a zero-sum game: that a nation is secure to the extent that others are not. Barry Buzan and his colleagues in the Copenhagen School offer a revealing ‘extended realist’ definition when they say that

security is about survival ... when an issue is posed as constituting an existential threat to a designated referent object [the state] ... The special nature of security threats justifies the use of extraordinary measures to handle them.

(Buzan et al. [1998](#): 21)

Critical writers, on the other hand, define security very differently. They argue that security should be holistic and not focused primarily on the state or military conflict. Ken Booth, of the Welsh School of critical security studies, argues that security should be about the ‘emancipation ... of individuals and groups from those physical and human constraints which stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do’ (Booth [1991](#): 319). Burke defines security in a cosmopolitan and post-human way ‘as coordinated and multilayered efforts to eliminate serious and avoidable harms and protect humanity and the biosphere from them’ (Burke [2016](#): 191). J. Ann Tickner ([1992](#): 127–44) defines security as ‘the elimination of unjust social relations, including unequal gender relations’. These definitions shift the ‘referent object’ of security from states to individuals, communities and the planet, and are biased towards a politics of social and ecological transformation.

## Key theories and concepts

There is a bewildering diversity of approaches to security policy and analysis. However, they can be usefully boiled down to the following broad categories:

- realist (incorporating classical realist, [neo-realist](#) and extended realist approaches)
- liberal (incorporating collective, common, cooperative and human security approaches)

- [constructivist](#) (incorporating elements of realist and liberal approaches)
- critical and feminist approaches.

### **Realist approaches**

As we saw with Hans Morgenthau's ([1973](#)) definition above, the realist paradigm focuses upon national security. Realist approaches privilege the state as the object of security and see threats primarily emerging from the military and economic competition between states. Because they discount the possibility of international cooperation or the development of peaceful norms of behaviour, they emphasise what they call the 'self-help' capacities of states in developing strong military forces and strategic [alliances](#) with other states. They are sceptical about the value of [international law](#) or 'collective security', although they do occasionally endorse the creation of coalitions of powers (such in the Gulf War of 1990–91) to punish or discipline a state that has acted in ways detrimental to their [national interests](#) or security. They regard [war](#) as a perennial tendency in human nature and argue that it cannot be abolished or controlled through law or moral suasion. Instead, they believe that the *fear* of unacceptable punishment (the core idea of 'deterrence'), or *prudence* in the face of unacceptable costs or a chaotic result, will restrain leaders from acting aggressively.

Realists thus think of the threat and use of armed force, after the theorist of war Carl von Clausewitz ([1989](#)), as dictated by national interests and cost–benefit analysis. They utilise an instrumental, *strategic* perspective that seeks to link violent means with political ends. However, in this arena, interesting debates among realists have arisen. On the use of force, realists have divided into two groups. A more hawkish group, associated with strategic studies and exemplified by thinkers such as Edward Luttwak ([1987](#)) and Colin Gray ([1998](#), [1999](#)), endorses violence as a tool of statecraft and is more

concerned with technical issues of weapons systems, military preparedness and military tactics and strategy. A second group argues that the use of force should always be a last resort and often has chaotic and costly effects that can't be anticipated (see Burke [2006](#); Brown [2003](#); Lebow [2003](#)). The actions of Robert McNamara and his colleagues during the Cuban missile crisis sit within this camp, and the opposition of Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer to the invasion of Iraq is another example (Blight and Lang [2005](#); Mearsheimer and Walt [2003](#)).

Deterrence, which is defined as 'manipulating another's behaviour through threats', has also generated complex debates (Freedman [2004](#): 6; Jervis [1979](#)). It developed after 1945 when US planners sought to grapple with the changes wrought by nuclear weapons. The strategist Bernard Brodie is famous for arguing that 'thus far the chief purpose of a military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them' (Brodie [1946](#): 67). Nuclear and conventional strategy henceforth was framed around the problem of developing doctrines and weapons systems that would deter Soviet or other enemy attack. Such approaches still underpin military strategies around the world, especially in Northeast Asia where the United States confronts China and North Korea with nuclear and conventional weapons. Yet realists also identified serious problems with the practice. John Herz ([1950](#)) described what he called the '[security dilemma](#)', which occurred as defensive measures by one state were perceived as aggressive or threatening by another, which in turn took new measures to secure itself, leading to a spiral of arms acquisition and mistrust (Booth and Wheeler [2008](#)). This could lead to crises such as those over Berlin (1961) or Cuba (1962), resulting in some analysts pointing out that once deterrence failed, the doctrine lost all value.

What Alan Dupont ([2001](#)) calls 'extended' security approaches do not depart from traditional realist understandings of military security dilemmas but – especially since the end of the [Cold War](#) – have pointed to a wider range of

security threats and challenges for states, such as terrorism, unregulated people movements, transnational crime, disease, or environmental degradation. These threats do not emerge from states or occur through armed violence, but it is argued that they can still affect the basic values and well-being of national communities. Some scholars and not a few policy-makers have also characterised such threats (especially from migration) as threats to the *identity* of receiving states, directly making [identity](#) a security issue – something critical scholars strongly question (Buzan et al. [1998](#); Chalk [2000](#)).

### **Liberal approaches**

Liberals argue that it is inadequate for security to be based on the power-balancing and deterrence calculations of individual states, believing that the carnage of the two World Wars and the dangers of nuclear holocaust require the development of international rules and cooperative institutions to govern state behaviour and punish wrongdoers. This attitude has influenced the development of an important body of international law and a number of global and regional institutions relating to security. The most important of these are the United Nations and its Charter, which outlaws armed aggression and will only authorise the use of force in defence against attack with the concurrence of the fifteen-member Security Council (see [Box 13.1](#)). Key treaties, which have the moral force of international law, include those on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Comprehensive (Nuclear) Test Ban Treaty and the Ottawa Convention banning land mines. Not only does the United Nations seek to control when states go to war (*jus ad bellum*); it also seeks to control how states may conduct wars (*jus in bello*) through the Geneva Conventions regulating war (see [Chapters 17](#) and [22](#)). These

operate against the background of a long list of other conventions protecting fundamental freedoms and human rights (see [Chapter 32](#)).

**Box 13.1:** Discussion points

**Global ecology, climate change and security**

By the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, it was becoming very clear that planet earth was facing very serious and interlinked ecological crises, at the same time as the political will and institutional capacity to address them was lacking. Trends in global greenhouse emissions were pointing towards a 3 to 4°C increase in global mean temperatures by 2100, a nightmare scenario in which icecaps would melt, coastal cities would be flooded, coral reefs and the Amazon's rich tropical ecosystem would be gravely damaged, countries would be subject to ever more severe heatwaves and some areas would become uninhabitable, and drought would worsen in some regions while hurricanes and storms would increase in others. Global food production would be put under severe strain, and tens of millions of people would forcibly be displaced. Due to their absorption of carbon dioxide, the oceans had already increased their acidity by 26 per cent since the beginning of the industrial era. Ocean acidification, when combined with other stresses such as overfishing and pollution, is predicted to cause a catastrophic decline in fish stocks and marine biodiversity by the second half of the twenty-first century (IPCC [2014](#); Worm et al. [2006](#)). To these projections can be added disturbing rates of deforestation, with a loss in global forest cover of an area the size of Peru since 1990 and an acceleration of 62 per cent in the rate of tropical rainforest loss, with its treasure trove of biodiversity. Global biodiversity loss is especially

disturbing, with studies showing that at least 617 species of vertebrates have become extinct in the wild since 1500, and half of the world's wild animal population has disappeared in the last 40 years (Ceballos et al. [2015](#); Hance [2016](#)).

Climate change and other environmental crises have thus stimulated a new literature and policy debate on 'environmental security'. The UN Security Council has held two debates on climate and security, but these showed significant discord over whether climate change should be considered a security problem and the Council has been stubbornly resistant about addressing environmental change in its work. The International Institute of Strategic Studies devoted 20 pages of its 2007 *Strategic Survey* to the threat of climate change, warning that 'if the emission of greenhouse gases is allowed to continue unchecked ... the effects will be catastrophic – on the level of nuclear war – if not in this century, certainly in the next' (IISS [2007](#): 49). It also published a study dealing with how climate change will create conflict, which argues that warming was a significant contributor to the conflict that led to genocide in Darfur (Mazo [2010](#)).

Some scholars have criticised the inappropriate securitisation of the environment, especially Think tank studies that are narrowly concerned with access to mineral resources, the implications for military organisations and the need to prevent environmental refugees from crossing national borders. This points to the ethical issues surrounding security policy. To counter this militarisation of environmental change, scholars have chosen to innovate. They have argued for new security paradigms: a paradigm of 'ecological security' that aims to secure 'the long-term integrity of the earth's ecosystems' rather than human interests in natural resources; 'worldly security', which aims to secure the worlds

in which ‘diverse forms of being’ coexist and entangle; and ‘security cosmopolitanism’, which insists on a fundamental ‘responsibility of all states and security actors to create deep and enduring security ... in a form that harmonises human social, economic, cultural and political activity with the integrity of global ecosystems’ (Burke [2013](#): 21; Burke et al. [2014](#): 111; Mitchell [2014](#)).

The NPT is a particularly important treaty, because it has seen 182 countries agree both *not to develop* nuclear weapons and, in the case of six existing ‘nuclear weapons states’, to *disarm* themselves of their arsenals. The treaty also has provisions for long-term efforts at *general disarmament*, because states recognise that the processes of conventional and nuclear weapons proliferation are linked. Hence [disarmament](#) is an important element of liberal thinking about security, even if they acknowledge that it is difficult to achieve in a world where many states find themselves in dangerous security dilemmas, and that disarmament requires cooperation and agreement to be effective. Liberals emphasise the importance of disarmament because they believe deterrence to be dangerously flawed and unstable; hence disarmament is the only effective way to prevent escalation to major war or disasters during a crisis (see ICNND [2009](#); McNamara and Blight [2003](#); Schell [2001](#)).

Regional cooperative security institutions include the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which was established in 1973 to moderate Cold War tensions (and now includes initiatives on human rights and the environment), and the [ASEAN](#) Regional Forum (ARF), which is an Asia-Pacific grouping of states that seeks to promote greater transparency and dialogue on regional security problems. Southeast Asia is an interesting case,

where liberal norms of conduct that preclude the acquisition of nuclear weapons and the use of force to settle disputes *between* regional states coexist with extended realist norms *within* regional countries about the need to respond violently to internal threats to national unity and stability. This tangle of ideas is expressed in the Southeast Asian notion of comprehensive security – which expands security beyond the military dimension to incorporate political, economic and societal dimensions, but is still focused upon the ‘stability’ and ‘integrity’ of regional states (see Acharya [2001](#); Alagappa [1998](#): 624–5; Burke and McDonald [2007](#)).

Liberals thus define their thinking and policy around three key concepts:

- [Collective security](#) generally refers to efforts to build rules and laws at the international level to create regional or global decision-making bodies and institutions, and to act in concert to enforce those rules. This is the paradigm at work when the UN Security Council deliberates or authorises military interventions, for example. In theory, its decisions are meant to express a collective – even universal – consensus, but they can sometimes express the influence of more powerful states.
- [Common security](#) was a concept developed by the 1982 Palme Commission to replace the doctrine of mutual deterrence. Its chairman, former Swedish prime minister Olaf Palme, argued that in the nuclear era we must ‘achieve security not against the adversary but together with him [sic]. International security must rest on a commitment to joint survival rather than on a threat of mutual destruction’ (Palme Commission [1982](#)).
- Cooperative security is an idea promoted by former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans in the context of the formation of the ARF, one that he claimed could fold collective, common and comprehensive

security into a conceptual whole (Evans and Grant [1995](#): 75–7). This idea he also used to promote more attention to the potential role of the United Nations in preventing genocide or crimes against humanity through diplomatic and military intervention; his and other efforts culminated in a report commissioned by the UN Secretary-General entitled *The Responsibility to Protect* (ICISS [2001](#)).

However, a fourth concept – human security – challenges Evans’ confidence in the coherence of the cooperative security concept, especially as it incorporates the idea of comprehensive security. Human security, which straddles the liberal and critical approaches, shifts the referent of security from the state to the individual human being, and incorporates a range of possible threats or processes that could negatively affect their basic welfare. While there has been much debate about the legitimate scope of human security, the most authoritative definition came from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which described it as ‘safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease and repression, as well as safety from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life’ (Roesad [2000](#)).

Human security allows us to conceive of states as threats to their citizens, and to see insecurity arising from complex social, political and economic processes (including those arising from widely accepted paradigms of development or political authority), rather than just military aggression or violence (Altman et al. [2012](#)). However, human security is not without its critics – in Southeast Asia it challenges existing structures of power, and many realist scholars believe that it complicates efforts to tightly define and focus upon security priorities (Bellamy and McDonald [2002](#); Burke [2001](#); Thomas and Tow [2002](#)). One important contribution to this debate has come from Robyn Eckersley, who argues that an antidote to the elitist ‘securitising’ of issues would

be to pay attention to the ‘virtues of debating and thus democratising’ them. In her view, nothing in this regard is more urgent than the problem of climate change, which promises a future in which states and communities face not weapons but ‘weather of mass destruction’ (Eckersley [2012](#): 196).

### **Constructivist approaches**

Constructivist approaches to security develop and refine both liberal and realist analyses, although they tend to support liberal approaches in [normative](#) terms. They seek to understand the ways in which *ideas* and *norms* affect international security and combine with national interests or military competition. As Peter Katzenstein and Rudra Sil ([2004](#): 9) argue, ‘constructivism is based on the fundamental view that ideational structures mediate how actors perceive, construct, and reproduce the institutional and material structures they inhabit as well as their own roles and identities within them’. Constructivists especially emphasise the way in which norms (broad intersubjective agreements about what kinds of policy or behaviour are legitimate, appropriate or effective) have the effect of controlling international politics (Reus-Smit 2004a: 40–68). Particular actions are then shaped or limited either *voluntarily* because an actor has internationalised a norm into their own identity or basic convictions, or because an actor feels *pressure* from other parts of their own or the international community.

A significant contribution of constructivist writers to security analysis is their development of Karl Deutsch’s concept of the [security community](#). As Emmanuel Adler and Michael Barnett state, this is to assert that ‘community exists at the international level, that security politics is profoundly shaped by it, and that those states dwelling within an international community might develop a pacific disposition [and] settle their differences short of war’. Security

communities emerge where there is ‘a development of shared understandings, transnational values and transaction flows [such as trade]’ (Adler and Barnett [1998](#): 3–4). Amitav Acharya ([2001](#)) and Alex Bellamy ([2004](#)) have both argued that features of security community exist in East Asia – especially among the ASEAN countries, which have agreed norms that prevent them from settling interstate disputes by force – that limit the role of great powers and prevent the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. While some critical writers acknowledge the value of this, they have also questioned how ASEAN combines liberal values at the interstate level with very coercive and authoritarian norms *inside* its countries (Burke and McDonald [2007](#)). Others have questioned the ways in which security communities can shift the antagonism to those *outside* the security community, potentially creating ‘regional fortresses preparing for the kind of civilisational conflict envisaged by Samuel Huntington’ (Bellamy [2004](#): 10–11).

### **Critical and feminist approaches**

Critical and feminist approaches to security are diverse, but they have in common a continuation of the basic normative orientation to human security. This is admirably expressed by the critical security studies thinker Ken Booth ([1991](#)) as a commitment to security as [emancipation](#), in the form of ‘a more just society’ that ‘progressively limits the repressive structure of powers and processes, steadily squeezing the space for violent behaviour in all its direct and indirect manifestations’, and by J. Ann Tickner’s ([1992](#): 127–44) vision of a security based upon ‘the elimination of unjust social relations, including unequal gender relations’ and for a reformulation of international relations in terms of the ‘multiple insecurities’ represented by ecological destruction, poverty and (gendered) structural violence. Booth ([2005](#): 263) argues that security needs to

be ‘holistic and non-statist’, because ‘the smaller units of universal human society ... will not be secure until the whole is secured’.

These are what Matt McDonald has called ‘reconstructive’ critical perspectives, ‘aimed at advancing alternative claims about what security is or should mean’. Another set of critical approaches (although they often converge) is termed ‘deconstructive’: they aim to put the meaning and operation of security as a *concept* and *politics* into question (Burke and McDonald [2007](#)). These approaches do not reject the desire to rethink security in better ways, but they also show how it has worked historically as a system of power and how this creates a barrier to defining it in ways that support human dignity. They are especially interested in how images of security and threat work to divide the world between ‘us’ and ‘them’, to construct identity in opposition to some ‘other’ – a nation, group, religion or way of living – that must be contained, destroyed or expelled (Burke [2007a](#)).

Critical scholars are also interested in how antagonistic constructions of identity are a factor in conflict. They point to the conflicts between North and South Korea, China and Taiwan, India and Pakistan, Indonesia and Papua, the Balkans, and Israel and Palestine, as particularly dangerous examples. Their argument is that even as there are significant military security dilemmas and other material interests at work, the roots of the conflicts lie in the ways in which identities have been constructed so as to deny the deep historical interconnections between societies, suppress or exaggerate claims to autonomy and difference, and deny the legitimacy and humanity of the other side (Bleiker [2001](#), [2005](#); Burke [2001](#), [2007b](#)). Hence critical and feminist writers seek to positively support *difference*, so as to show how inequality and violence are differentially distributed (the effects of the global economy or militarised violence affect men and women differently, for example) (Lee-Koo [2002](#); Pettman [1996](#); Sylvester [2002](#); True [2012](#)) (see [Box 13.2](#)).

### **Box 13.2: Key texts**

#### **Sex and death in the rational world of defence intellectuals**

Feminist scholars rethink security in two ways: by alerting us to the distinctive effects of economic processes, war and conflict on women's lives (True [2012](#)); and by analysing how constructions of gender are central to dominant ways of thinking about security and defence (Tickner [1992](#): 6). An example was set out in a famous essay by Carol Cohn, who wrote about her experiences studying at a Centre for Strategic Studies. Her essay analysed the very abstract and gendered language through which strategists made nuclear deterrence and war thinkable, acceptable and rational. The very destructive effects of nuclear weapons were sanitised by terms such as 'clean bombs' and 'counter-value attacks', and associated with masculine images of force, power and sexual domination through terms such as 'penetration aids' and arguments that US dependence on nuclear weapons for security was 'irresistible, because you get more bang for the buck', or that 'to disarm is to get rid of all your stuff'. Debates over the virtues of 'protracted' versus 'spasm' attacks were resolved by describing the latter as 'releasing 70 to 80 per cent of your megatonnage in one orgasmic whump'. Cohn ([1987](#): 693, 696) suggests that this was both 'a deadly serious display of the connections between masculine sexuality and the arms race' and 'a way of minimizing the seriousness of militarist endeavours, of denying their deadly consequences'.

A further contribution of critical writers is to show the role of *representation* in threat analysis and security policy, and to highlight the

increasingly politicised nature of security discourse. They argue that security threats are not objective, and that some threats are not threats at all, but are the product of representation through language and metaphor (Hansen [2006](#); Wibben [2011](#)). They argue, moreover, that the politics of fear (or security politics) is an increasingly common feature of modern democracies, and that it is used to demonise particular groups, to gather votes and to exert power over minorities or the left (McDonald [2005](#)). The Copenhagen School's 'securitisation' theory provides one account of how these processes work and can be challenged (Huysmans [2006](#)); another approach has been a Foucauldian 'practice turn' (Bigo [2013](#)), which places the concrete strategies and structures of power mobilised by security politics under scrutiny; and other more Derridean approaches radically deconstruct the relationship between national sovereignty, identity and violence. These writers argue that such a politics is central to the way in which sovereign states and political communities have been conceived within modernity, and that it involves forms of 'biopolitical' power that take hold of ordinary citizens' bodies and selves as a way of entrenching forms of economic [hegemony](#) and injustice, and violent ways of being (Agamben [1998](#); Burke [2007a](#); Dauphinée and Masters [2007](#)). In such a circumstance, emancipation is a difficult task indeed – even if it is important to struggle for.

## Conclusion

Security is currently the major preoccupation of modern world politics. It both expresses important concerns about human survival, values and community, and is liable to abuse by the unscrupulous in their struggle for political power and privilege. It forms a complex, interconnected set of global problems – encompassing war and civil conflict, nuclear weapons, faith, terrorism, health,

environmental change and inequality – where the interests and dignity of individuals vie with the machinations of violent and powerful actors. We may have high hopes for a new spirit of consensus and cooperation to solve global security problems, but achieving it will be a major task in itself.

## Discussion questions

**13.1** Why is the concept of security ‘contested’?

**13.2** Why is there global disagreement about what security problems matter? What should be done about it?

**13.3** Does the use or threat of force lead to security?

**13.4** What are the benefits and flaws of constructivist theories of security?

**13.5** What is ‘critical’ about critical security approaches? Are they practical?

**13.6** How might we begin to realise security for all human beings?

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# Arms control



**Marianne Hanson**

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## Introduction

This chapter begins by discussing what arms control is and why it has featured so prominently in world politics, even since the end of the [Cold War](#). After a

discussion of the various weapons that are covered by arms-control processes, and the legal [regimes](#) that accompany these, the chapter outlines some of the ways in which arms control can be conceptualised and how various schools of thought in International Relations (IR) can be related to arms-control practices. We then look at the specific case of the nuclear weapons regime, as more [states](#) acquire nuclear weapons, and as calls increase for the elimination of these particular [weapons of mass destruction \(WMDs\)](#).

## What is arms control?

Arms control can be described simply as any arrangement made to limit the weapons that might be used in warfare. It can be conducted as a formal process involving treaties, or as an informal practice between states. These processes or steps can be [unilateral](#), [bilateral](#) or [multilateral](#); the most essential element is a willingness to cooperate with other states to achieve [security](#) interests. These interests could be ‘exclusively those of the cooperating states themselves’ or interests that are ‘more widely shared’ in the international community (Bull [1961](#): 2).

Arms control has been applied to both WMDs and to conventional weapons, although it has been related most heavily to WMDs. These are nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons, and are categorised as WMDs because of their enormous potential for causing mass casualties. (These are nevertheless very different types of weapon systems, and their lethality and damage potential vary greatly.) While WMDs are rightly abhorred for their capacity for destruction, so-called conventional weapons – that is, weapons that are *not* WMDs – have received less attention, largely because of the implied right of [sovereign states](#) to possess a normal or ‘conventional’ weapons

capability. Although the focus for arms control continues to be on WMDs, certain kinds of conventional weapons are also now being considered as appropriate for restriction or elimination.

## **Why do states engage in arms-control practices?**

There are compelling reasons why states might wish to conduct arms-control arrangements. In a landmark study, Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin ([1985 \[1961\]](#)) explored the motivations of states to cooperate. First, mutually agreeing to limit the kinds or numbers of weapons states may hold can help to prevent the outbreak of [war](#) between them. In this sense, arms control can be seen as a means of lessening, if not overcoming, the negative effects of the [security dilemma](#) that often leads to a spiral of arms acquisition. Given that wars can occur because of the fear of the military [power](#) of one's adversary, any mutual agreement to limit arms can open up communication between states, and lead to greater transparency and a better understanding of a state's intentions. This process is also referred to as a 'confidence-building measure'.

Arms control can also reduce greatly the military and economic costs of preparing for war; knowing that an adversary will not acquire a type or particular numbers of weapons is of benefit to states when making their own calculations about military preparedness. There is also, of course, a very compelling humanitarian reason for engaging in arms control: if war does break out, deaths and casualties will likely be limited because of undertakings previously made to restrict weapons held by all warring parties. It is this humanitarian consideration that is now, arguably, the most prominent driver of contemporary arms-control and disarmament efforts.

## Cold War arms control

Arms control found particular resonance during the Cold War, when the world was faced with the very real possibility of nuclear war occurring between the major antagonists in that conflict, the United States and Soviet Union, and their respective allies. The United States had exploded the world's first atomic bombs over Japan in 1945; the Soviet Union acquired its nuclear capability in 1949 and an upward spiral of nuclear arms acquisition quickly followed. The intensification of what is sometimes called the 'first nuclear age' led, in the 1960s, to formal and binding agreements between these states. Because of the hugely destructive nature of nuclear weapons, it was clear that various agreements must be reached if these states were to prevent a catastrophic war engulfing humankind. The Cold War also brought the concept of 'mutually assured destruction' – a situation that would occur if nuclear [deterrence](#) failed and nuclear war was launched.

Notable products of this effort at arms control by the [superpowers](#) included the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963), the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) Agreements of 1972 and 1979, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987, and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START) between the United States and Soviet Union/Russia), begun in 1991. The earlier treaties did little other than to enshrine a balance of terror between the superpowers, rather than bringing about any meaningful reductions in the numbers of nuclear weapons. It was only towards the end of the Cold War, and especially with the emphasis put on arms control by the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, that substantial reductions began to occur under the START process.



**Figure 14.1** Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and US President Reagan signing the INF Treaty at the White House, December 1987

These were all bilateral treaties; there was little or no mechanism for states other than the superpowers to have any substantial impact on arms control during the Cold War. There were three notable exceptions to this, however. Even though it was an initiative of the two superpowers (and by this time Britain, France and China had also joined the nuclear club), the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was clearly designed to operate at a global level. It was followed in 1972 by the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC), also a multilateral treaty – albeit one that still lacks any effective monitoring and verification abilities. An important arms-control achievement relating to conventional weapons, and another multilateral agreement, the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, emerged in 1990 and was crucial to the winding down of conventional weapons held by the superpowers and their allies in the European arena at the end of the Cold War.

**Why is arms control still important?**

Arms-control and disarmament processes are still important in the post-Cold War era because, while the incidence of warfare has declined, several conflicts continue to exist. The use of various deadly weapons continues and in particular, from the 1990s onwards, we have seen an increase in the spread of small arms and light weapons. The need to continue with arms control is also not surprising when we consider that although the United States and Russia have made dramatic reductions in their nuclear arsenals, there still remain over 15 000 nuclear weapons in the world today (SIPRI [2016](#)), many of them on hair-trigger alert. The vast majority of these weapons are held by the United States and Russia (see [Table 14.3](#) for details). Chemical and biological weapons are now almost completely eliminated, but there are still instances where these have been used recently, or where they might be used, and it is important to ensure that the prohibition treaties regarding these weapons are upheld. In any case, states continue to spend substantial amounts of money on their national security, much of it on armaments, and it is important to ensure that any weapons manufactured, transferred or used are compatible with the various arms-control and disarmament treaties that have been negotiated. Fortunately, the end of the Cold War freed up processes of arms control to include initiatives and participation from a much broader range of states than was possible during the more rigid structure of the bipolar order, and the involvement of numerous civil society actors.

If the continued existence of many thousands of nuclear weapons has been an incentive to continue with arms-control measures after the end of the Cold War, so too is the view that certain other kinds of weapons should also be controlled. Thus, in the post-Cold War era, we have seen arms-control processes extended to other WMDs (chemical weapons), and to certain kinds of conventional weapons such as landmines and cluster munitions, because of their highly destructive and/or indiscriminate nature, as well as to the spread of

ballistic missiles, and materials and technology that can be used for illicit weapons purposes. In 2013, an Arms Trade Treaty was completed. While this is not an arms control or disarmament treaty per se, it seeks to make more transparent the trade in conventional weapons by establishing common international standards for their import, export and transfer, a limited, but nevertheless historic development. The most prominent arms-control and disarmament agreements reached since 1990 are listed in [Table 14.1](#).

**Table 14.1** Major arms agreements reached since 1990

<b>Name of treaty/convention</b>	<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Relevant difficulties</b>
START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) 1, 1991	Restricted the United States and Russia to no more than 6000 strategic nuclear warheads each and incorporated unprecedented verification and monitoring controls.	Represented complex negotiations but resulted in a drastic reduction of Cold War nuclear arsenals.
START 2, 1993	To achieve further deep cuts in the strategic nuclear arsenals of the United States and Russia.	Not ratified by Russia until 2000; Russia then dismissed the treaty in response to US abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002. Eventually overtaken by the SORT treaty.
The Chemical Weapons Convention	Banned the production, stockpiling and use of	Signed and ratified by most states, including all

(CWC), 1993	chemical weapons; global in scope; included well-developed monitoring and verification procedures.	large states in the international system; the destruction of stockpiles is slower than envisaged.
The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review and Extension Conference, 1995	Five-yearly reviews of progress made in non-proliferation and disarmament efforts are routine; this review noted for extending the treaty indefinitely.	Marked by tension between the nuclear weapon states pushing for extension, and some non-nuclear weapon states who preferred extension to be conditional on disarmament by those states with nuclear weapons.
The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), 1996	To ban the testing of nuclear weapons; part of the agreement to extend the NPT (note above).	Cannot enter into force until ratified by key states, among them the United States, China, India and Pakistan.
The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (The Ottawa Landmines Convention), 1997	To ban the production, stockpiling and deployment of anti-personnel landmines.	Initiated by civil society groups and supported by Canada; United States, China, Russia have resisted signing.
The SORT Treaty	To limit the United States	Critics argue that it

The SORT Treaty  
(Strategic Offensive  
Reductions Treaty,  
also known as the  
Moscow Treaty),  
2002

To limit the United States  
and Russia to 1700–2200  
deployed strategic  
nuclear weapons each by  
2012.

Critics argue that it  
allowed unlimited  
numbers of nuclear  
weapons to be held as  
non-deployed.

The Convention on  
Cluster Munitions  
(Oslo Treaty), 2008

To prohibit the use,  
transfer and stockpile of  
cluster bombs.

Led by civil society  
groups and the state of  
Norway, but resisted by  
key states who produce  
and use cluster bombs  
(including US, Russia,  
China, Pakistan and  
Israel).

New START, 2010

Replaced the expired  
START1 Treaty. Limits  
the US and Russia to no  
more than 1550 deployed  
strategic warheads and a  
maximum of 800  
launchers and heavy  
bombers. It also restores  
the monitoring and  
verification provisions  
that had lapsed with the  
expiration of START1.

Faced considerable  
ratification difficulties in  
the United States, but is  
seen as a key victory in  
President Obama's  
proposal to eliminate  
nuclear weapons.

The Arms Trade  
Treaty, 2013

To make more  
transparent the trade in  
conventional weapons,  
especially those weapons  
which might be used to  
violate human rights or  
hamper economic

Difficult to monitor given  
state sovereignty issues;  
signed by the United  
States but not yet ratified;  
not yet signed by Russia,  
China, and certain other  
weapons manufacturers.

development.

In addition to these treaties, the post-Cold War era has seen the strengthening of various export-control measures vital to non-proliferation efforts, some of which had been established during the Cold War. These measures are listed in [Table 14.2](#).

**Table 14.2** Export-control measures

The Zangger Committee, 1974	Thirty-nine members maintain a list of nuclear-related equipment that may only be exported if International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards are applied to the receiving state or facility.
The Nuclear Suppliers Group, 1975	An agreement among forty-eight nuclear material supplying states to ensure that exports of nuclear materials or technology for peaceful purposes cannot be used for weapons purposes.
The Australia Group, 1985	An informal arrangement among forty-two states to restrict the export of materials that might be diverted to the production of chemical or biological weapons.
The Wassenaar Arrangement on Export Controls for Conventional Arms and Dual-Use Goods, 1996	The successor to the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom) arrangement, this forty-one member group attempts to regulate materials pertaining to

conventional arms.

The Missile Technology Control  
Regime, 1987

An agreement between thirty-four states to prevent the proliferation of missile technology; it was supplemented in 2002 by the International Code of Conduct against Missile Proliferation (ICOC) and its membership of 119 states.

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One fact becomes evident when we look at the range of agreements reached. Included among them are explicit programs of *disarmament*. Although arms control and disarmament have in the past been seen as distinct processes – with ‘arms control’ implying the continued, albeit limited, existence of particular weapons and ‘disarmament’ specifying the complete abolition of a particular weapon – it is possible to argue that we are seeing a greater degree of convergence in these ideas. Where arms control was considered to be a discrete process, and one that aimed essentially to confirm and, importantly, to *balance* weapons possession between participating states, disarmament was seen as both a process and an end-state – the end-state being the complete elimination of a type of weapon. Although disarmament acquired something of a bad name during the era of the League of Nations (it clearly was not able to disarm Germany effectively), more recent attempts at the disarmament of specific kinds of weapons have been successful. We have seen the banning of biological weapons via the BWC, the destruction of a particular kind of weapon – intermediate-range nuclear forces – in the INF Treaty, the banning of chemical weapons with the CWC and, in terms of conventional weapons, the 1997 Ottawa Convention banning landmines and the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions. These latter treaties were the result of intense lobbying by non-government organisations concerned with the humanitarian effects of landmines and cluster

munitions. This element – of non-state drivers of arms control and disarmament processes, for humanitarian rather than strategic motives – is a noteworthy feature of contemporary international politics.

This strengthening of the limiting of weapons suggests that differences between arms control and disarmament processes are now arguably more blurred than they once were. No agreement these days attempts to enshrine indefinitely the possession of particular weapons by states. Indeed, it is possible to see – at least in some cases – arms-control processes as being part of a desired move towards disarmament. The SORT and NewSTART agreements between the United States and Russia, for example, are an essential step towards the goal of the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons – something the five ‘legitimate’ nuclear weapon states are obliged to do under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Sometimes, therefore, the terms ‘arms control’ and ‘disarmament’ are used interchangeably, even though the degree of overlap between these processes will vary according to the weapon under consideration.

## **New initiatives in arms control: Conventional weapons**

One important development in the area of arms control is that conventional weapons – or, rather, certain types of conventional weapons – are also now becoming objects of keen attention. This development should not be over-stated: conventional weapons, as their name implies, are seen as ‘normal’ and it should not be interpreted here that the sovereign right of [nation](#)-states to possess (and indeed to manufacture and export) arsenals of various (non-WMD) weapons is coming under serious threat. But we have seen two very important agreements – the 1997 Ottawa Landmines Convention and the 2008 Convention on Cluster

Munitions – ban widely used conventional weapons, a development that would have been considered highly unlikely even as recently as twenty years ago, while the Arms Trade Treaty of 2013 allows a certain amount of intrusion into what has traditionally been considered the sole prerogative of the sovereign state.

**Table 14.3** Estimated nuclear weapons stockpiles

Russia	7290
United States	7000
France	300
China	260
United Kingdom	215
Pakistan	110–130
India	100–120
Israel	80
North Korea	5–10

**Source:** This data is drawn from the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Global Nuclear Weapon Inventories* and SIPRI [2016](#). Figures are approximate.

We have also seen close attention being paid to small arms and light weapons (SALW), with growing concern about their spread and their devastating impacts. These are weapons that commonly are possessed by all states (see [Box 14.1](#)), but their spread has come to be recognised as posing a substantial threat to international and domestic security, resulting as it does in

the deaths of between 300 000 and 500 000 people every year, up to 80 per cent of them women and children. This is evident from numerous studies – see, for example, the report published by the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War in their international campaign to prevent small arms violence (IPPNW [2005](#)). Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan suggested that perhaps SALW should be considered ‘the real weapons of mass destruction’, as these are used on a daily basis with devastating results. They are relatively cheap to purchase, easy to handle and have come to be the weapon of choice in numerous deadly internal conflicts around the world. There are estimated to be around 900 million SALW in circulation at present, serving to fuel and prolong conflict, and to make the processes of conflict-ending, and development and reconstruction, immensely difficult (Small Arms Survey [2010](#)). The [United Nations](#) initiated a Conference on the Illicit Traffic in SALW in 2001, which resulted in a Program of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons. Regulating the trade in SALW now falls within the broader Arms Trade Treaty.

#### **Box 14.1: Terminology**

##### **Small arms and light weapons**

Small arms are weapons designed for individual use, such as pistols, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns. Light weapons are designed to be deployed and used by a crew of two or more, and include grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank and missile launchers, recoilless rifles and mortars of less than 100 mm calibre. This working definition is taken from the website of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk).

Other conventional weapons and weapons systems are also now coming under increasing scrutiny, although they are not yet covered by any international treaties. In particular, the use of unmanned drones in warfare, and the potential creation of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS or, as they are commonly known, ‘killer robots’) are causing considerable concern for those involved in arms control and disarmament.

Drones (or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) are aircraft either controlled by ‘pilots’ from the ground or, increasingly, autonomously with a programmed mission. They can be used for reconnaissance and surveillance, but also to carry weapons – especially missiles. Drone warfare was prominent in the ‘War on Terror’, and these vehicles have been used extensively in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. Unlike aircraft, which are piloted, they can stay airborne for many hours; they are cheaper to build and run than are other kinds of aircraft; and they are flown remotely, so there is no danger to a flight crew. It is this last factor especially that has raised concerns: drones allow for detachment, and depersonalise the use of force. Drones are not inherently illegal weapons, according to Christof Heyns, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, but there are issues about the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms during warfare, even during counter-terrorist operations. In any case, the accuracy rate of drone strikes is said to be very low, and this has, controversially, led to many civilian deaths. As a result, the United Nations and civil society actors have called for a greater degree of transparency regarding their use.

Killer robots are fully autonomous weapons that would be able to select and engage targets without human intervention. While the very term brings to mind a science fiction-type of weapon and an improbable development, the advent of killer robots is in fact much closer to reality than we might assume. Precursors to completely autonomous weapons have already been deployed, and it is predicted

that fully autonomous weapons could be operational within 20 to 30 years (Human Rights Watch [2012](#)). These are currently being built by the United States, China, Israel, South Korea, Russia and the United Kingdom (and, in some cases, are already in use – albeit in limited ways). Since 2013, concerns about killer robots have featured prominently at the UN General Assembly’s First Committee on Disarmament and International Security. While attempts to restrict the development of these weapons are conducted within the context of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (also known as the Inhumane Weapons Convention), little progress has been made there. As a result, numerous civil society groups, under the coalition ‘The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots’, have sought alternative pathways to ban these weapons and, together with like-minded states, are calling for a pre-emptive ban. As Human Rights Watch ([2012](#)) notes, because of the lack of meaningful human control, ‘these weapons would be incapable of meeting international humanitarian law standards ... [They] also raise serious questions of accountability because it is unclear who should be held responsible for any unlawful actions they commit.’ All of the developments discussed above, the completed treaties and the attempts to regulate emerging weapons systems could be considered as the beginning of a trend to scrutinise conventional weapons much more closely than was possible during the Cold War. However, it must be noted that, despite the success in achieving these agreements – and especially the creation of the Arms Trade Treaty that seeks to restrict what sovereign states can and cannot do – substantial barriers exist in attempts to regulate conventional weapons generally. These include the fact that a vast global arms trade is perpetuated legally by the most powerful states in the [international system](#), including China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Impediments to progress will remain, but there is no doubt that the issue of arms control has evolved over time to the point where we are now beginning to

see questions raised even about the (legal) arms trade and the extent to which the world can continue to tolerate the almost unfettered manufacture and distribution of conventional arms by sovereign states.

One of the reasons for this is that [human rights](#) and humanitarian issues have come to prominence in international relations over the past two decades, and have affected the traditional agendas of politics, security and ‘business as usual’. There is also now greater attention paid to the gender implications of weapons use. So, while the ‘human cost’ element was raised even in early studies of arms control, we might argue that this issue is only now gaining significant attention in debates on how states may conduct themselves in warfare: the Ottawa Landmines Treaty, one of the first to focus on non-WMDs, was propelled by humanitarian concerns; for the first time, the report of the 2010 Review Conference of the NPT mentioned the link between nuclear weapons and [international humanitarian law](#) (the laws of war) (see [Chapter 17](#)). All this means that we are beginning to see even the normal sovereign ‘rights’ of states to produce and export weapons coming under an unprecedented level of scrutiny.

## **Arms control and International Relations theory**

How might we view the ideas and processes of arms control at a conceptual level? Which IR theories can help us to understand the motivations and objectives of those state leaders and, increasingly, civil society groups that participate in such processes?

Arms control is tied up intrinsically with conceptions of international and domestic security, and how these might best be achieved. Typically, since 1945, security issues have been dominated by the [realist](#) school of thought in

international relations (see [Chapters 3](#) and [13](#)). With its emphasis on self-help in an anarchical world, the need for military preparedness, and its contention that ongoing security dilemmas will affect strategic calculations, we might conclude that for realists, arms control and disarmament matter very little. Cooperation with an adversary can never be as effective as unilateral, independent and unfettered action.

We can also see, however, that even for realists, the need to cooperate with an adversary can be overwhelming and can bring security benefits, in terms of stability, transparency and at least an element of predictability. Most early writers on arms control approached the subject from a hawkish perspective, but nevertheless understood the benefits – especially in the nuclear age – of exercising restraint (Bull [1961](#); Schelling and Halperin [1985](#)). In this sense, we might even argue that such cooperation was an early variant of what has subsequently come to be known as [common security](#), a condition in which states recognise that achieving their own security requires consideration of an adversary's security concerns also (see Palme Commission Report [1982](#)). It can be argued, then, that the practice of arms control and disarmament is actually an area where realists and liberal [institutionalists](#) can agree. Against such an interpretation, we do have to note the continuing relevance of assertions of independence of action, and the risk of defections from arms-control regimes. The approach to arms control taken by the United States from the late 1990s to 2008 reminds us that, ultimately, sovereign rights cannot easily be dismissed in the search for compliance. The United States, in this period, withdrew from a major arms-control treaty (the 1972 ABM Treaty) and refused to sign or [ratify](#) various other significant treaties. Other large states occasionally act in similar ways (China, for instance, has not ratified the CTBT), but it has been the United States that has been the most visible actor with regard to resisting the growing momentum for controlling weapons.

Yet, while these independent or rejectionist approaches might remind us of the anarchical structure of our world, it is also important to note that the vast majority of states have indeed signed up to, and abide by, a wide range of arms-control agreements. Here we might apply a [liberal](#), and especially a liberal-institutional, conception of world politics, whereby there is a recognition that while conflict might be a permanent feature of our landscape, nevertheless it can be managed by confidence-building measures, recognition of human rights, cooperative agreements and the institutionalisation of these through [international law](#) and organisations. Related here is the [English School](#) of International Relations [theory](#) that posits an [international society](#) bound together by a raft of rules and [norms](#) that together make for a functioning and orderly international system. Of further interest are the questions posed by [constructivists](#), who explore the origins and development of ideas and norms in international relations. They might well ask questions such as: How has the nuclear taboo arisen? (Tannenwald [1999](#)); Or why is it that humanitarian issues and legal norms are increasingly imposing themselves onto strategic calculations? Importantly, we can see that ideas about legitimacy, the moral responsibility of the state and duties to [humanitarianism](#) are changing, and that there is no longer an *a priori* ‘right’ of states to arm themselves with particular weapons or to engage in unrestricted warfare.

## **Nuclear weapons: A special case?**

Of all the arms-control regimes discussed here, the most prominent in international relations is that of nuclear weapons. This regime has as its cornerstone the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 (NPT). This treaty is reinforced by a number of related mechanisms and arms-control measures: the

IAEA, which oversees monitoring and verification of compliance with the NPT, especially through its enhanced safeguards or ‘Additional Protocol’ programs (although it is unable to monitor or verify activities of the nuclear weapon states); the mechanisms listed in [Table 14.1](#) designed to curb the illicit transfer of nuclear materials and technology; and the creation of nuclear weapons-free zones in various parts of the world.

While the world has not seen the military use of nuclear weapons since they were first used in 1945, there is a fear that they will be used in the future – either deliberately or inadvertently by states that possess them, or – in line with recent concerns – by [terrorists](#) or other sub-state groups. The overwhelming concern that is commonly portrayed is the need to prevent further states and terrorist groups from acquiring these weapons. In other words, the focus is very much on non-proliferation. For others, however, while remaining concerned about proliferation, a concomitant need is to hasten the elimination of nuclear weapons altogether – that is, to move towards full nuclear disarmament.

The NPT was essentially a bargain between the nuclear weapon states (NWS) and the non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS): in exchange for the latter promising not to develop or acquire nuclear weapons, the former – the ‘recognised’ nuclear weapon states of the United States, Russia, Britain, France and China – have promised to eliminate their nuclear arsenals (although there is no date specified for this) and to assist the NNWS with the transfer and use of nuclear materials and technology for peaceful purposes. These three elements – non-proliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful use of nuclear technology – constitute what are known as the three ‘pillars’ of the NPT.

All three pillars are now under stress. Nonproliferation norms, while they have largely been successful in that some 183 states have chosen not to acquire nuclear weapons, may be insufficiently strong against the desire of some states to acquire nuclear weapons. In addition to the fact that India, Pakistan and Israel

hold nuclear weapons (and refuse to sign up to the NPT) there have been the following recent developments: the detection in 2004 of the [A.Q. Khan network](#), which had illegally provided nuclear assistance to various states; the testing (in 2006, 2009, 2013 and twice in 2016) of a nuclear weapon by North Korea, which had left the NPT in 2003, and suspicions about the nuclear intentions of Iran, which had enriched uranium in a covert manner. These fears have been considerably assuaged by the ‘Iran deal’ brokered by President Obama in 2015. Whether President Trump will rescind this agreement remains to be seen.

The NPT’s provision of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes is also undergoing stress, as current and widespread concerns about energy resources propel more states to contemplate the use of nuclear energy. Apart from concerns about the safety of such energy programs, there are fears that they will make nuclear weapons proliferation easier for a growing number of states. On the plus side, most states have embraced UN Security Council Resolution 1540, which tightens controls on exports related to WMD manufacture.

Most controversially perhaps, nuclear disarmament remains a slow and tenuous process, as the NWS resist implementing the promise of elimination made by them under Article VI of the NPT and that they have reiterated ‘unequivocally’ at NPT Review Conferences. While the numbers of nuclear weapons have dropped considerably from the height of the Cold War, it seems clear that these privileged five states will not move towards the full elimination of their nuclear weapons. The problem here is that as long as some states hold nuclear weapons, this will inevitably be an incentive for others to acquire them.

There have been long-standing calls for the nuclear weapon states to eliminate their arsenals, and these have been echoed even by notable conservatives within the United States, such as Henry Kissinger (Shultz et al. [2007](#)). The reasoning here is compelling: nuclear weapons have little or no

utility in resolving current challenges to security, and unless the NWS are seen to be practising the nuclear abstinence that they insist others adopt, it is hard to persuade would-be nuclear proliferators to desist (Hanson [2002](#)). Additionally, the arguments suggest, if chemical and biological weapons have been banned – a ban accepted by all the NWS – why is it that the third kind of WMDs, nuclear weapons, remain permitted, and then only to a select group of states? To complicate matters further, even those states once condemned for joining the nuclear ‘club’ in 1998, India and Pakistan, were cultivated as allies by the United States in its war against terrorism. This has been compounded recently by the United States, which now assists India’s civilian nuclear program, despite the fact that India has never signed the NPT. Thus an environment of deep inequality in international security continues (Perkovich [2005](#)).

## **The Humanitarian Initiative and a treaty banning nuclear weapons**

The Review Conference of the NPT in 2010 included a small but significant catalyst for change: its final document noted that many states now wanted to see a legal prohibition against nuclear weapons, and that any use of nuclear weapons would violate international humanitarian law. This prompted the creation of the Humanitarian Initiative, which sought to redirect the debate on nuclear weapons away from the somewhat sterile ‘strategic’ focus and towards a humanitarian reframing. A series of three conferences, examining the consequences of nuclear weapons’ use, showed conclusively that in the event of the use of even less than 1 per cent of existing arsenals, the world would face a catastrophe, to which no effective health or governmental response could be forthcoming. Even a ‘small’ nuclear war would result in a nuclear winter affecting the entire world (Robock

et al. [2007](#)), and would result in up to two billion people dying of starvation (Helfand [2013](#)).



**Figure 14.2** Nuclear weapon test Romeo on Bikini Atoll, March 1954

Frustration was growing at the slow pace of disarmament; at the same time, more information was being released about the numerous accidents at nuclear facilities (Schlosser [2014](#)) and the close calls over the years (Lewis [2014](#)), and non-nuclear states were growing impatient at the double standards employed by the NWS. At the 2015 NPT Review Conference, many non-nuclear weapon states signed up to an ‘international pledge’ to advance disarmament, and in October 2016, a historic vote in the UN General Assembly was taken to draw up

a nuclear weapons ban-treaty in 2017. Although the nuclear weapon states are unlikely to sign such a treaty, at least initially, it will be an important legal and normative development in stigmatising these weapons (Acheson et al. [2014](#)). A nuclear weapons ban-treaty, when it comes into effect, will surely be one of the most important arms-control agreements ever to have been made. It will also represent the triumph of a committed group of non-nuclear states working closely with civil society actors to achieve an agreement, even in the face of strong opposition from the great power nuclear weapon states.

## Conclusion

This chapter suggests that while some substantial obstacles remain to advancing arms control and disarmament, much is continuing in this field, and the majority of states are taking their obligations seriously and accepting new controls on weapons proliferation. While much will depend on the activities of the nuclear weapon states, when we calculate the probabilities of disarmament or further nuclear proliferation, we can take some heart from the fact that the majority of states in our [international society](#) readily embrace existing and new measures designed to reduce the likelihood of war and to protect human life. This broad and habit-forming culture of compliance cannot guarantee an absence of defections or a world free from the worst kind of inhumane weapons, but nor should its [normative](#) and cumulative power be under-estimated.

## Discussion questions

**14.1** How important is the process of arms control for mitigating the security dilemma?

**14.2** In what ways do contemporary arms-control and disarmament efforts differ from the processes witnessed during the Cold War era?

**14.3** Can the nuclear non-proliferation regime survive intact if Article VI, requiring the nuclear weapon states to disarm, remains unfulfilled?

**14.4** Is it correct to say that humanitarian and legal factors are overtaking factors of strategy in the contemporary process of controlling arms?

### *Further reading*

Burns, Richard Dean 2009, *The evolution of arms control: From antiquity to the nuclear age*, Westport, CT: Praeger. *A useful overview of the historical antecedents that inform current thinking on arms control; also examines many oft-neglected background issues such as processes of demilitarisation, attempts to outlaw war and the regulation of arms manufacturing industries.*

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Cirincione, Joseph, Wolfsthal, John B. and Rajkumar, Miriam 2005, *Deadly arsenals: Nuclear, biological and chemical threats*, 2nd ed., Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *A concise and useful overview of WMDs, including state possessors, examples of successes in non-proliferation and challenges still facing the non-proliferation regime.*

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International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament 2009, *Eliminating nuclear threats: A practical agenda for global policymakers*, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament, [www.icnnd.org/Reference/reports/ent/default.htm](http://www.icnnd.org/Reference/reports/ent/default.htm). *Assesses the threat of nuclear catastrophe and proposes a number of short-and medium-term practical steps governments can take to reduce the dangers of accidental or deliberate nuclear weapon use.*

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Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2016, *The SIPRI yearbook: Armaments, disarmaments and international security*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An excellent resource, updated annually, reviewing global and regional security developments and listing armaments holdings of key states.*

# The causes of war



**Hidemi Suganami**

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## Introduction

This chapter examines what causes [war](#) between states. First, I briefly address some preliminary questions: When/why did the causes of war become important to the study of International Relations (IR)? What is at stake in this issue? Why does it matter? To whom? The next section outlines some of the major issues and debates in this subject-field of IR with reference to a few selected landmark contributions over the last several decades. The following section presents what I regard as the most useful set of concepts for analysing and understanding this topic.

Before I begin the discussion, I should clarify that, usually – and this is the practice I follow in this chapter – only those interstate armed conflicts with more than a certain number of total battle deaths are treated as ‘war’. IR scholars generally set this minimum at around 1000 in line with the ‘Correlates of War Project’ definition (Singer and Small [1972](#): 381). The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), with just *one* ‘battle’ death – of an American U2 pilot shot down over Cuba – was clearly not ‘war’ by this definition, whereas the Falklands War (1982), resulting in about 950 battle deaths, is usually treated as ‘war’; ‘not to count it [as war because the number fell below the 1000 mark] would be splitting hairs’ (Russett [1993](#): 12).

Interestingly, war has not always been regarded as a problem requiring serious scholarly attention to its causes. Strange though it may now seem, some thinkers and practitioners – especially of the nineteenth century – held a benign or even positive view of war. Especially through the experience of World War I, however, a contrary view that sees war in a negative way – as a criminal act or a pathological state requiring prevention and remedy – has become dominant. Our interest in the causes of war rather than, say, heroic deeds on the battlefield is a reflection of this broad shift in our attitude towards war. Since this shift was also a key factor in the formation of IR as an academic [discipline](#), it is unsurprising that inquiry into the causes of war has been a traditional concern of that subject (see [Introduction](#)).

Contrary to a general impression, however, war is relatively rare: most states live in peace – or are not at war – with most other states most of the time. Still, when a war comes, it often has unpredicted, hugely negative and long-lasting consequences, as witnessed most recently in the aftermath of the 2003 US/UK-led invasion of Iraq. It is this appreciation that sustains our interest in the search for war’s causes in the contemporary world (Levy and Thompson [2010](#): 56). For, the thinking goes, in order to reduce the incidence of war, we must first

learn what its main causes are; without this knowledge, there is no hope of achieving that goal. What is at stake in this issue – the causes of war – is none other than peace. We must not automatically assume, of course, that peace is preferable to war under *all* circumstances. Still, the study of the causes of war matters because – even where it is fought for a just end, for example (as most would agree), to defeat Nazi Germany (1939–45) – war can and often does generate unintended consequences and immense suffering by ordinary citizens.

## **The causes of war and International Relations**

The best-known landmark IR text on the causes of war is Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State and War* ([1959](#)). In this book, Waltz discusses two interrelated analytical frameworks for the study of the causes of war.

One is well known. Almost any IR student knows, or is expected to learn, that there are what Waltz ([1959](#)) called the three 'images' of war. According to the first, war occurs primarily because of the nature and behaviour of human beings. According to the second, the main cause of war is found in the war-prone internal structure of a particular type of state – for example, a dictatorship. According to the third, to which Waltz attached a special significance, the most fundamental cause of war is located in the anarchical structure of the international system, whereby there is no effective authority in the international system to prevent war if two or more states are willing to fight it out. Such a system, Waltz argued, is one of self-help, to which war is integral. Waltz later expanded his third-image view of the causes of war into a more general structural theory of international politics, or [neo-realism](#), to explain recurrent features of world politics in the light of the anarchical structure of the international system (Waltz [1979](#)).

But there is a second analytical framework concerning war upon which Waltz touched in *Man, the State and War*. This relates to a variety of interactive processes between states through which war comes to be fought. Waltz did not develop this second analytical framework fully, but offered an important starting point when he briefly outlined two causal scenarios of war ([1959](#): 234).

One is where A wants X, which B possesses, and resorts to war to get it. The aforementioned Falklands War (1982) illustrates this: A = Argentina; B = Britain; and X = Islas Malvinas, as the Argentines call the Islands. Waltz observes that such a scenario combines two types of cause: A's desire for X, which is in B's possession, and the fact that there is nothing in the international system to prevent A from resorting to war against B. Waltz calls the first the 'efficient cause' of such a war and the second its 'permissive cause'; the former causes or initiates war in this particular instance, while the latter makes that, and any other, outbreak of war possible.

To this, Waltz adds a second scenario. Driven by their insecurity under anarchy, A and B may aim to increase their own security through military means, yet never gain true security in the process because the other side does the same – a process known in IR as the 'security dilemma'. If such a process escalates to a point where A feels compelled to resort to a preventive war against B, fearing that it will later lose the relative advantage it now enjoys, the 'permissive cause' of war – international anarchy – has turned into the 'efficient cause' of war, Waltz argues. This scenario captures what was feared in the early stages of the Cold War, when Waltz was writing: that it might come to a disastrous end. It is well to note, however, that there is no *necessary* connection between international anarchy and a runaway security competition. Whether one leads to the other depends on what sort of 'society' the states think of themselves as forming under anarchy, a point Alexander Wendt developed in his *Social*

*Theory of International Politics* ([1999](#)) as a constructivist corrective to Waltz's neo-realism.

For Waltz, therefore, there are two standard 'motives' for war: desire (or material interest) and fear (or security). There are other landmark contributions to causes-of-war studies in IR which go beyond Waltz's somewhat under-developed treatment of this issue – which, in his stress on interest and fear, reflected his realist leanings. One of these contributions is *International Disputes* by Fred Northedge and Michael Donelan ([1971](#)). This is the first study in IR to distinguish between 'competition' and 'dispute', and attach a special significance to the latter type of conflict. According to the authors, 'competition' is a conflict of desires, whereas a 'dispute' is a conflict of the claims of just entitlement; in a competition we say, 'We want X' but in a dispute we say, 'X is, or should be, ours'. The latter type of conflict is harder to resolve because a belief in the justness of one's claim to a land, for example, does not easily induce a compromise; think of the intractable conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. The idea that 'justice' is an important motive for war was examined further by David Welch in *Justice and the Genesis of War* (1995), but the key idea was already worked out in the United Kingdom in the 1970s outside the realist paradigm still dominant in the United States; Northedge and Donelan were part of the cluster of IR academics who later came to be known as the [English School](#).

Importantly, Northedge and Donelan included 'honour' as a key motive of nation-states and sub-national groups. Being successful in any form of international competition brings national honour – think of the great power status associated nowadays with a successful economy and advanced technology. But, also importantly, suffering injustice is considered a form of 'dishonour', which must be avenged by force if necessary – and this is especially

so in an anarchical system of states where self-help is the rule and patriarchal images of power and hierarchy have prevailed.

A similar line of thinking is developed further in Ned Lebow's *Why Nations Fight* (2010a) in which he lists fear, material interest, standing, and revenge as the four key motives for war initiation by states. Testing against large historical data, Lebow judges that material interest (or desire) and security (or fear) have not been dominant motives for states to initiate war and that today there is a growing realisation that war does not serve any of these goals. Lebow's interpretation challenges conventional wisdom, epitomised in Waltz's two war-initiation scenarios, centred on desire and fear.

Another noteworthy contribution is a pioneering, though now mostly forgotten, historical-sociological work by Evan Luard, *War in International Society* (1986), in which he investigated what states fight about in war. He noted that if we describe what states fight about in very general terms, most wars will look alike; they all fight about 'national interest' or, at most, a small range of things that Lebow later categorised. But if we describe what states fight about in concrete detail, each war will be seen to be unique. However, Luard observed astutely that if what states fight about is described at an intermediate level of generality, it is possible to see a broad historical pattern whereby the dominant issues of war shift

from questions of dynastic rights in the late Middle Ages, to questions of religions in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, questions of political and commercial rivalry in the period 1648–1789, questions of national unification and national independence between 1789 and 1917, and questions of ideological competition in the most recent period [up to the time of his writing].

(Luard 1986: 18)

Luard's key insight is that this period-by-period shift in what states predominantly fight about reflects the nature of the states and the beliefs of those

in power in each period of international society.

There is considerable arbitrariness in Luard's ([1986](#)) historical analysis. Nevertheless, his overall approach contains great insight. What sort of society states form under anarchy and, concomitantly, what type of thinking about war and peace prevails within the society? These are key determinants of the conditions of life in that society and its overall war-proneness. The kinds of issues that are deemed war-worthy are a key aspect of this. Importantly, if a community of states emerges where resort to war is effectively ruled out as a means of solving any of their differences, war will become obsolete in their social relations.

In IR, such a community is called a 'pluralistic security community' – 'pluralistic' because it comprises a number of states and '[security community](#)' because there is no threat of war inside it (Deutsch et al. [1957](#)). The United States, Canada and Britain form such a community, as do Norway, Sweden and Finland. Even outside such mature communities, the dominant idea about which issues are war-worthy has changed considerably over the past 100 years, and gradually reduced the rationale for states to resort to war (Lebow [2010a](#); Luard [1986](#)). However, the post-9/11 US practice of preventive war and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 illustrate the precariousness of this evolving process, just as the al-Qaeda attacks and subsequent transnational terrorist incidents inspired by [Islamic State \(IS\)](#) are an acute reminder that the control of the use of force by states is not an adequate response to violent challenges now facing the world (see [Chapters 13, 16 and 29](#)). Moreover, global warming, if it is not swiftly brought under control, is very likely to worsen severe food and water shortages in many parts of the world, and when combined with the presence of 'failed states' in Africa and elsewhere, not only large-scale intrastate violence and mass migration, but also interstate war driven by material interest and fear, are likely to threaten our future.

The few landmark works discussed briefly in this section are in my view among the more insightful contributions to the study of the causes of war in the past several decades of IR. In the next section, I offer a different take, however. Rather than go straight to the most important causes of war, as did Waltz in the main part of his classic text, or try to classify key motives for war, as did Waltz, Northedge and Donelan, and Lebow, or the main types of issues about which states have fought, as did Luard, I take a step back and start again from the very basic issue of the kinds of question IR has raised about the causes of war and how we may answer them.

#### **Box 15.1:** Discussion points

##### **Waltz on the causes of war: Key points**

Where is the major cause of war to be found?

- The first image: in the nature and behaviour of human beings.
- The second image: in the war-prone internal structure of certain types of states.
- The third image: in the anarchical structure of the international system.

What kinds of cause are there?

- The ‘efficient cause’ brings about particular outbreaks of war.
- The ‘permissive cause’ – international anarchy – allows this to happen.

Waltz’s two scenarios of war

- War occurs because of A's *desire* for X which B possesses.
- War occurs because international anarchy induces mutual *fear* between A and B, and one of them resorts to a preventive war against the other.

## The causes of war: Questions and answers

Resort to war involves human agency, and people are known to react in different ways to similar circumstances and in similar ways to different circumstances. Given two similarly war-prone circumstances, war may follow from both, from one but not the other, or from neither. Some researchers therefore suppose that there won't be any regular causal paths to war, but only many different ones, and specialise in the study of the origins of particular wars. This is common among historians. But others explore whether some common patterns may be found in the ways by which war comes about. Either way, some ingredients of particular paths to war may, under some general descriptions, reappear here and there, individually or in combination, in this order or that. Such items may be called war's *contributory causes*, some may perhaps be more commonly associated with war than others. There is also a possibility – although only a remote one – that one or more of these reappearing factors are not just contributory but indispensable. Such factors, if any, would constitute war's *necessary conditions*. When we ask about the causes of war, it is important to know whether we are exploring war's necessary conditions, relatively common causal paths or contributory causes. In this section, I will discuss them in turn ([Box 15.2](#)).

### **Box 15.2:** Discussion points

#### **Three kinds of questions about the causes of war**

- 1 What are the necessary conditions of war?
- 2 Are there any relatively common causal paths to war?
- 3 What are contributory factors towards the occurrence of war?

#### **Necessary conditions of war**

A search for war's necessary conditions has not produced very good answers. This is unsurprising. For some item to be war's *necessary* condition, it is not enough that, in its absence, war has not occurred. We must have a good reason to believe that war could never happen in its absence. This feature of a necessary condition is clear when we consider a familiar example. The presence of oxygen is a necessary condition of a fire; in its absence, a fire has not occurred and could not do so according to our understanding of natural science.

IR specialists now broadly agree that there has not been any clear case of war between constitutionally secure **liberal** democracies (Doyle [1986](#); see also [Chapter 2](#)). And we may find some reasons as to why between such states war would be rare: institutional and normative constraints; mutual trust reinforced by the record of unbroken peace; **alliance** against common undemocratic enemies; commercial **interdependence** (Levy and Thomson [2010](#): 108–17). But there is no persuasive reason why, like a fire without oxygen, war is never possible between such entities. The absence of democracy from at least one of the two parties cannot therefore be treated as a *necessary* condition of war.

It is fairly common to suppose that war begins because both parties consider they have a good chance of winning (Blainey [1988](#)). Optimism for victory, however, is not a necessary condition of war either. A country may go to war appreciating that the chances of victory are slim, as did Japan against the United States in 1941 (Sagan [1989](#)). It is enough for a war-initiator to calculate that, even though the chances of victory are small, it is better to fight now because what that can probably bring is better than almost certain and unacceptable consequences of not fighting now. This form of calculation may combine with sheer unwillingness to accept what a country sees as unjust conditions imposed by its enemies. In such circumstances, the country might attack its opponent, calculating – or hoping – that it may be able to harm them sufficiently to gain some concessions from them. Egypt acted in this way in the 1973 October War which, through a remarkable turn of events, led to the Egyptian–Israeli Peace Treaty of 1977.

### **Common causal paths to war**

As there are some familiar ways in which marriages break down or children become delinquent, so there may be some relatively common ways in which countries come to fight. Paul Senese and John Vasquez ([2008](#)) have tried to articulate one such path. This comprises a number of steps: the presence of a dispute between two states roughly equal in power increases the probability of war between them, especially if it is a territorial dispute; a territorial dispute tends to breed other territorial disputes and a crisis more crises; responding to the deteriorating conditions by alliance-formation further increases the probability of war; arms races also increase the probability of war, as does a history of rivalry, eventually leading to an outbreak of war as options narrow.

However, even though the impact of each step along this path may cumulatively increase the probability of war at the end, the path itself is only one of many possible routes. If those things that Vasquez and Senese present as the signs of coming war do occur, war may indeed be a likely outcome. But this does not necessarily mean that most wars have come about, or will do so in the future, along the path they have constructed.

The causal path they have constructed is in the nature of a *cautionary tale*; it is a model causal path whose steps recur here and there, individually or in combination, in this order or that, in various actual paths to war. But actual causal paths to war contain a wider variety of steps, or contributory causes, than are included in Senese and Vasquez's model. There are some more cautionary tales to tell.

### **Contributory causes of war**

Many factors contribute to war; they are either 'things that happen' or 'things that are done'. 'Things that happen' may occur by chance or follow automatically from a given condition, as nothing stops them. When we add 'things that are done' to these two, we have three types of contributory cause regarding war: chance occurrences unexpectedly turning the sequence of events in the direction of war; war-conducive mechanisms; and actions and inactions of certain key actors contributing to the coming of a war ([Box 15.3](#)).

#### **Box 15.3:** Discussion points

##### **Three kinds of contributory causes concerning war**

- 1 Chance occurrences, unexpectedly turning the sequence of events in the direction of war

2 War-conducive mechanisms

3 War-conducive actions and inactions of the key participants

### *Chance occurrences*

Things that happen by chance always involve at least two things occurring at the same time, and perhaps in the same place: they are chance coincidences. One of the best-known cases of a chance occurrence contributing to war is the June 1914 assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist, Princip, opposed to Austria's takeover of Bosnia. Princip's presence in Sarajevo at that time was, of course, no coincidence; he went there with intent to harm the Archduke. But the circumstances were such that Princip would most likely have failed if Ferdinand's car, driving fast, had not had to stop. The chauffeur, having taken a wrong turn, was told to halt, back up and get back on course. And this occurred yards away from where Princip happened to be, enabling him to shoot Ferdinand and his wife at point-blank range.



**Figure 15.1** Archduke Ferdinand and the Duchess of Hohenberg shortly before their assassination in Sarajevo, 8 June 1914

This incident is usually characterised as a spark that ignited the fire, it being generally supposed that without the highly inflammable circumstances of Europe around that time, a World War would not have broken out. But without that particular spark, no fire would have been ignited then, and it is not easy to imagine how, through another causal path, a war like World War I would have come about. It is conceivable for the system to have survived without a major war for some time (Lebow [2010b](#): Chapter 3).

How much weight the Sarajevo incident, and the chance factor that decisively contributed to it, had as a cause of the war is a matter of interpretation. If you are in search of a *common* contributory cause of large-scale wars involving several [great powers](#), the assassination of a foreign dignitary will not score high on the list. You may, accordingly, not put much causal weight on Ferdinand's assassination, or on the crucial chance occurrence that enabled it, in your explanation of this particular war; you may wish to highlight those other features of the particular causal process that are more likely to be

repeated elsewhere, such as an uneven development, economic needs and militarism.

It is undeniable, however, that the assassination, and the chance factor that enabled it to succeed, played an indispensable role in the particular sequence of events that led to the Austrian declaration of war on Serbia – which, in the circumstances, escalated to what we now call World War I and without which such a war might not have come about after all. A chance factor therefore can be said to have played a significant contributory causal role in relation to World War I as it actually happened.

### ***War-conducive mechanisms***

A ‘mechanism’ is at work when a mechanical device functions as designed and, by extension, when something that is not itself a human-made machine works in a machine-like manner without anyone bringing about the outcome intentionally. In international relations, such mechanisms work in all directions, some reinforcing and some counteracting one another, and in situations where chance happenings and human actions intervene, so that the operation of mechanisms does not necessarily lead to any specific outcomes in this field. It is difficult to ascertain, therefore, that a particular mechanism exists, and was at work, in a given case.

Suppose that two democratic states A and B have not engaged in war for decades. However, inasmuch as they live under [anarchy](#), we may expect them to have been subjected to war-conducive mechanisms associated with an anarchical [international system](#). Yet there may also be a variety of peace-conducive mechanisms at work due to their shared democracy.

How do we know which of the two opposing sets of mechanisms is going to be stronger in the A–B relationship? The answer may be that we do not until we

know the outcome. In the present case, the outcome is decades of peace, so we may work backwards from that and suggest that peace-conducive mechanisms associated with shared democracy seem to have prevailed. But how do we know that such mechanisms operated at all in this particular instance? The only way is to trace how A and B have behaved towards each other in detail and see whether there is any evidence to support a hypothesis that certain peace-conducive mechanisms associated with shared democracy were at work in their interactions.

Similarly, a detailed reconstruction is the only way towards supporting a hypothesis that there were certain causal mechanisms in operation in the collision course which led to a particular outbreak of war. For example, there is a psychological mechanism called the 'groupthink syndrome': 'a concurrence-seeking tendency which can increase resistance to policy change through illusion of unanimity and invulnerability, moral certainty, self-censorship, and collective rationalization' (Levy [1986](#): 214). Such a mechanism may reduce decision-makers' flexibility in a crisis where much innovative thinking is required to avert a war. But whether such a psychological mechanism really worked in a given case is a question about which we can only gain some limited understanding through a close study of the decision-making process itself.

It is one thing to try to reconstruct the details of a particular causal path that led to a war; however, it is another to be made aware of a wide variety of causal mechanisms that have a potential to work as steps to war. IR's search for the causes of war, as surveyed expertly by Levy and Thomson ([2010](#)), has suggested a wide range of such mechanistic steps. These include mechanisms rooted in the structural characteristics of a given type of international system or [bilateral](#) relations, those stemming from the governmental and social structures of certain kinds of states, and individual and group psychological mechanisms.

However, none of these war-conducive mechanisms single-handedly explains the phenomenon of war. These mechanisms are among war's many contributory causes, neither necessary nor sufficient by themselves to bring about a war.

### ***Key actions and inactions***

War typically requires one party (A) to decide to force upon the other (B) a choice between immediate surrender and war, and the other party (B) to choose not to surrender without a fight. A may take that decision in a number of ways. For example, it might resort to war in a premeditated and aggressive manner against a totally innocent victim B. Or A's decision to go to war against B may be an act of exasperation against B's aggressive acts.

The first kind of case is illustrated by Germany's invasion of Belgium at the beginning of World War I (1914) and the second by the punitive war by the US-led coalition against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (1991). Between these two poles are cases of preventive war: for example, Pakistan's war against India in 1965 and, more recently, the US/UK-led war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq (2003).

Long-premeditated aggressive wars are relatively rare, however, and the decision to resort to war usually comes at the end of a meandering process of interactions between the countries involved. Such interactions include a number of typically war-conducive acts, and these too form important *steps to war*. Among them are 'insensitive acts', 'reckless acts' and 'acts of contributory negligence'.

A's act is 'insensitive' in relation to B when it does not realise the extent to which its actions are seen by B as offensive. Argentina's 1982 invasion of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands is an archetypal example: its leaders appear to have

supposed that this would force Britain to negotiate over the disputed territories rather than fight back to repossess them.

A ‘reckless act’ is committed when A realises that B may respond by force to the course of action it is about to undertake but goes ahead with it even though it is clearly aware that B’s military intervention would bring a serious disaster to A. Hitler’s 1939 invasion of Poland, which forced Britain to declare war on Germany, is an archetypal example.

‘Contributory negligence’ occurs when (as in the appeasement of Nazi Germany in 1937–39) B fails to take appropriate measures against A’s aggressive foreign policy early on, thereby unintentionally encouraging A to become more daring, and ends up having to fight A at a later date. Importantly, however, it was the fear of repeating this mistake that influenced some key decisions by the United States (e.g. in its invasion of Cuba in 1961) and Britain (e.g. in its war against Egypt in 1956) in the post-World War II era ([Box 15.4](#)).

#### **Box 15.4:** Discussion points

##### **War-conducive actions and inactions of the key participants**

- A premeditated aggressive act against another
- An act of exasperation at the aggressive behaviour of another
- An insensitive act
- A reckless act
- An act of contributory negligence

## **Conclusion**

IR studies the causes of war because one of its key aims is to contribute to world peace. Many cautionary tales can be told about how war comes about, and one of IR's traditional concerns has been to identify their key ingredients. For this purpose, a detailed study of particular cases is just as important as an attempt to see whether there may be some criss-crossing over a number of cases. We may not in the end find any regular causal paths to war, but some family resemblances are noticeable in a wide range of particular causal paths because some contributory causes of war will appear here and there, from time to time, in combination or in isolation.

These contributory causes are of three kinds: chance occurrences; war-conducive mechanisms; and war-conducive actions and inactions on the part of the key actors. Of these, the first warns us of unexpected turns of events that may set countries on a collision course. IR scholars often focus on the second and alert us to a wide range of war-conducive processes that narrow down the leaders' options. But what these leaders do, or fail to do, are also key ingredients in the steps to war, and it is their responsibility to consider the likely consequences of their actions and inactions very carefully. The knowledge of the contributory causes of war, readily available in IR (and in International History), provides a range of cautionary tales and valuable insights. But which lesson should be applied to a particular case – for example, should we appease the opponent or strike him now – is a matter of political judgement, the quality of which can only be assessed – usually – in the subsequent unfolding of events. All the more reason exists, then, for the leaders and IR scholars to eschew over-confidence in what they do in action and what they impart as knowledge.

## **Discussion questions**

## Discussion questions

**15.1** What are Waltz's *two* analytical frameworks for the study of the causes of war?

**15.2** What is the difference between (1) necessary conditions of war, (2) common causal paths to war and (3) contributory causes of war?

**15.3** How significant a causal factor is 'chance' in bringing about a war?

**15.4** Give two examples of war-conducive mechanisms.

**15.5** Are all wars intended?

## *Further reading*

Lebow, Richard N. 2010, *Why nations fight*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *This book examines the relative significance of 'material interest', 'fear', a quest for 'standing' and 'revenge' as motives for war.*

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Levy, Jack. S. and Thompson, William. R. 2010, *Causes of war*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. *An impressive overview and analysis of the theoretical and historical arguments about war's causes.*

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Suganami, Hidemi 1996, *On the causes of war*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A theoretical study of war's causes that draws upon philosophy, narrative theory and IR theory.*

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Waltz, Kenneth. N. 1959, *Man, the state and war: A theoretical analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press. *A classic account of three levels at which war's major causes may be located.*

# The changing character of warfare



**Robert Ayson**

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[The diversity of warfare](#)

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## **Introduction**

The [discipline](#) of International Relations (IR) owes its origins to the study of [war](#) and [peace](#). But do the wars of the early twenty-first century differ so fundamentally from their predecessors that they need to be considered in quite different ways? This chapter provides a barometer on the character of warfare and its implications for contemporary international relations. It begins with warfare's diverse ends and means before considering five leading issues: the role of violence in warfare; the extent to which that violence is organised; the political nature of war; the interactive nature of warfare; and the scope and scale of war. The overall argument presented here is that while war today may look rather different from wars of earlier periods, much of its essential nature remains intact. This should make us sceptical about claims that the role of war in international relations has somehow been revolutionised.

## **The diversity of warfare**

IR students need little reminder that they are traversing a discipline with hotly contested leading concepts. But we might be excused for supposing that the meaning and character of something as concrete as *war* would be an open and shut case. As this author has indicated elsewhere (Ayson [2006](#): 10–24), the field that looks at the place of war in international politics – strategic studies – often avoids debates about meaning and terminology, let alone [theory](#).

But war can mean quite different things to different people in different parts of the world. Aside from such unhelpful notions as the 'War on Terror' and the 'war on drugs' (which are about as meaningful as the idea of a 'war on war' itself), our subject admits to a quite remarkable variety. It includes large-scale and nearly total war between [states](#) (and groups of [nation](#)-states) as seen in the twentieth century's two World Wars. It includes interstate war fought in more

limited fashion for more limited goals (as in the war between Britain and Argentina over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands in the early 1980s). Also included are the messy internal wars including the American [Civil War](#) in the 1860s, China's long war, which Mao's [communist](#) forces eventually won in the late 1940s, and, much more recently, the violence between multiple factions in Syria's brutal civil war, which began in 2011.

War can also occupy a mid-point between internal and interstate, as witnessed in Vietnam from the 1940s to the 1970s. To some observers, this was part of the global [Cold War](#) contest between the [superpowers](#) and their proxies; to others, it was a war for national liberation and unity. And wars certainly do not require formal (and internationally recognised) state boundaries to operate between or within. They existed well before the Peace of [Westphalia](#), as any student of the Bible (or of Chinese history) will attest. Moreover, some efforts at waging war have deliberately exploited the unclear boundaries between state and non-state action. With its undeclared use of Russian soldiers among pro-Russian militias, Vladimir Putin's government has prosecuted a 'hybrid' war in eastern Ukraine.

There has also been significant variety in the physical means used to wage war. The development of military technology following the second Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth century meant that the succeeding generation had access to weapons systems its predecessors could only have dreamed of. But as Biddle ([2004](#)) argues, the pace of military technological innovation is not as rapid as it may seem, and even today, wars are fought with weapons of incredible simplicity as well as those of great technological complexity. On the one hand are the simple firearms (including crude homemade weapons) employed by the irregular armies fighting on Bougainville in Papua New Guinea in the 1990s and by groups in Ghana and some other West African countries. On the other we can consider the vast information-processing power behind the US

weapon systems used against Slobodan Milosevic's Serbia in the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and in the initial attack against Iraq in 2003, and the more recent use of aerial drones against individual targets in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. We can stretch our imaginations as well to the prospect of a war involving the only genuine [weapons of mass destruction \(WMD\)](#) – nuclear weapons – although of course for the citizens of Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945 no such imagining was required.



**Figure 16.1** The diversity of war – a child soldier in the Congo

This diversity would suggest that war's nature (what is at its essence) and even war's character (how it is represented on the battlefield) do not necessarily undergo wholesale change whenever one period of international relations gives way to another. Even so, it is often assumed that with the end of the Cold War, intrastate (or internal) wars rose to take the place of interstate armed conflict. But little more than a decade after the Berlin Wall came down, researchers were already suggesting that while 'civil wars are breaking out at an all-time record rate', the respective frequencies of interstate and intrastate wars had remained stubbornly consistent over several decades (Sarkees et al. [2003](#): 62). While

famous for tensions between states (and for interstate wars in places like the Korean Peninsula), the Cold War was also an era of collapsing colonial empires, and struggles for independence in which [guerilla wars](#) were fought. But the term ‘guerrilla’ actually goes back to the resistance mounted by sub-state groups in Spain against Napoleon’s armed forces in the early nineteenth century.



**Figure 16.2** An F-20 fighter aircraft firing an air-to-ground missile

Nonetheless, we need to take seriously arguments that there have been significant changes in the way wars are fought, in who does the fighting and in why they do so. But to do this we need a handle on war. Useful here is the description of war proposed by Jack Levy ([1998](#): 141) as ‘large scale organised violence between political actors’. Each part of this definition will now be used to offer insights.

**Digital battlespaces and virtual media wars**  
**Sebastian Kaempf**

While Western governments until very recently were able to control the ways in which their citizens were exposed to an instantaneous, real-time (albeit one-sided and sanitised) image of war, they are now finding themselves caught up in waging an unprecedented virtual war of images alongside the physical/‘real’ conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria. Today, war is no longer conducted purely by the dispatch of Tomahawks in the air or Kalashnikovs and suicide attacks on the ground, but also by means of bytes, blogs, bandwidths, digital images and computer simulations.

Digital new media technology has challenged a key aspect of Western war-fighting strategy: the ability to control the visualisation and representation of its own wars. In the case of the United States, for instance, this perceived need to control the (visual) representation of war stems from the political fallout caused by the Vietnam War. The prevailing view among key American decision-makers in the Pentagon and the White House was that the war in Indochina would have been won if it had not been for the alleged misrepresentation of the conflict by the American print media, radio and television networks. As a consequence, the Pentagon set up the so-called ‘pool system’ and invented ‘embedded journalism’ as a means to manage the media and – most importantly – to control the (visual) representation of America’s wars (Carruthers [2000](#)). By putting in place a system of media management, the Pentagon regained the ability to control the (visual) representation of US wars among the American public (and a wider Western audience). Set up with the invasion of Grenada in 1983, this system has continued through the 1991 Gulf War until today. Over the last four decades, identical developments have been underway in other

Western militaries, including the Australian and British militaries (Rid and Hecker [2009](#)).

The controversial phenomenon of ‘embedded journalism’ therefore needs to be understood as a response by Western militaries to the increasing mediatization of war; war has become a spectacle where warring factions use and manipulate media entertainment networks as part of their military strategy. This does not necessarily mean that the conventional ‘old’ media (radio, printing press and television) have lost all their political independence, but that the sources they access, the information they publish and the images they use are more susceptible to control by the military’s media management (Münkler [2006](#); Kaempf [2013](#)).

Media management has been central not only to creating but also sustaining popular notions of ‘costless war’, an imaginary underwritten by repeated replays of ‘bomb’s eye views’ transmitted from precision-guided missiles as they hurtle to their targets. Carefully selected images conveyed by Western military operations present US, British and Australian operations as precise, discriminate and clean, suggesting a ‘grammar of killing’ that avoids the unnecessary spilling of blood (Der Derian [2001](#)). This ability to frame the perception of their operations as humane and surgical has been regarded by Western militaries as essential to creating and sustaining the legitimacy of warfare in the public’s eyes. The situation has changed fundamentally, however, with the emergence of digital new media technology. New media technology has enabled adversaries to break Western militaries’ hitherto exclusive ability to frame the perception and visual representation of warfare by creating virtual counter-realities that aim at scrutinising and delegitimising US, Australian and British operations in their global ‘War on Terror’

(Kaempf [2013](#)). Public beheading videos and images showing the devastation and civilian costs of war (to name just two examples) have been produced as deliberate juxtapositions to the sanitised visualisations of warfare offered by Washington, London and Canberra. With the West's attempt to humanise warfare (by making war appear bloodless), non-Western adversaries such as al-Qaeda, Iraqi insurgents or [Islamic State \(IS\)](#) have actively tried to dehumanise war by exposing and celebrating the shedding of blood (Kaempf [2017](#)). New media technologies have thus afforded non-state actors with unprecedented capacities to erode Western electoral support for the 'War on Terror', while simultaneously enabling them also to use these very same technologies to radicalise and mobilise globally dispersed constituencies in support of jihadist terrorism.

Through these new media outlets, Western adversaries have been able to reconceptualise public media as a battle space and to employ public relations as a soft power weapon in its own right. New media technology in that sense provides a cheap and user-friendly means to produce and disseminate competing virtual realities and create rival narratives in order to influence the perception of a certain conflict. As a result, some of the most critical battles in the 'War on Terror' – the first major conflict waged in the new media age – have not been fought only in the mountains of Afghanistan or the streets of Baghdad, but also in US, British and Australian newsrooms and – just as importantly – in various internet forums, via YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, in chatrooms and in the blogosphere. Most of these new media outlets are removed from the tight control of Defence Ministries' PR specialists and thereby offer platforms through which the uninterrogated virtual reality offered by Western operations can be put into question.

This development has started to transform the experience of war for it allows for the production of competing virtual realities. This is why, for the first time, we are witnessing a new media war – or what Paul Virilio (2002: ix) calls a ‘cybernetic war of persuasion and dissuasion’, where the prime strategic objectives are no longer exclusively the elimination of the enemy’s military forces but also the (re)shaping of public opinion. With terrorists and insurgents vying for ‘hearts and minds’, and Western support for the war effort hinging on the idea of ‘costless wars’, the new media have become an important, even decisive, conduit and arena for the ‘War on Terror’.

## War as violence

Because it involves violence and because of the damage, death and trauma that violence produces, war represents an extreme form of political action. In international politics, there is no more important decision for a country’s leaders than to go to war. And there is no more serious threat that one country can make towards another than to indicate that it is prepared to resort to war over the issue at hand. For [realists](#) at least (and for some other international relations scholars too), the capacity to wage war is the *sine qua non* of [power](#) in the [international system](#).

But, rather than suiting the foreign policy aims of states, the use of force can have its own destructive logic. For example, the mobilisation crisis of August 1914, as each European great power responded to the military preparation that others were making, led to a World War that nobody seemed to want. And if US president John F. Kennedy had decided to bomb Cuba during

the 1962 missile crisis with the Soviet Union, it is hard to see how the escalation would have stopped (especially once the first nuclear weapons were used). The greatest philosopher of war, Carl von [Clausewitz](#) (see [Box 16.1](#)) – a Prussian officer who saw at first hand the capacity for violence that the French [Revolution](#) allowed Napoleon to wield on the battlefield – saw it thus:

war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes.

(Clausewitz [1989 \[1832\]](#)): 77)

Clausewitz also spoke about the strange, unintended consequences of war as an act of violence. One such outcome was friction, where anything that can go wrong does in the heat, noise and confusion of battle: misunderstood or misleading communications; failing machinery and weapons systems; accidents and mistakes made under stress. A related condition is the fog of war – the very things (such as the illusion of control) that seem clear before the first shot is fired can easily become obscured as violence corrodes everything in its wake.

### **Box 16.1:** Key figures

#### **Carl von Clausewitz**

Clausewitz's *On War* ([1989](#)), first published in 1832 (a year after his death), has something for almost anyone. For a number of German military thinkers in the build-up to World War I, Clausewitz was the prophet of the offensive. For American strategists grappling with the destructive nature of nuclear weapons, his ideas of limited war for limited aims had obvious appeal. But therein lies both the beauty and the hazard of his writings. *On War* is philosophically ambitious and full of paradox. We can find ammunition today for arguments that war is

destined to get messy and out of control, and counter-arguments that violence can be adjusted to fulfil the ends of policy. Clausewitz's greatest contribution was to highlight the political context within which war occurs, but because the relationship between force and power can be so difficult, we should be wary of attempts to understand his work in just one dimension.

This sets up a challenge for modern armed forces: with the benefits of advanced technology and training, can they master friction and pierce the fog of war? Optimists suggest that the Information Age promises a [revolution in military affairs](#), transforming the way that wars are fought and how armed forces are arranged to fight them. In these visions, pilots and missile controllers have full awareness of their battlespace and deliver precision-guided munitions to their intended targets with unerring accuracy, avoiding wider casualties and damage.

Other more sceptical voices suggest that revolutions are political matters, not technological or organisational ones (Freedman [1998](#)). And some of the after-action reports from US military action in Iraq in the early 1990s, when Information Age warfare was supposed to have arrived, suggested that these campaigns had not been quite as precise or limited as had been hoped. Interspersed with the apparent military successes of the early post-Cold War period were images of confusion and fear in Mogadishu as the US Somalian adventure came undone, and stories of millions of dead from the brutal war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq for the second time, the demise of Saddam Hussein's regime unleashed an orgy of civil violence. The resulting deaths of over 4000 US service personnel

served as a reminder that friction and the fog of war were far from vanquished. Russia's recent use of devastating force in support of the Assad government in Syria suggests that for modern scenes of horror like Aleppo, the experience of war is one of indiscriminate rather than carefully controlled violence.

## War as organised violence

There is something, therefore, to the idea that war is inherently uncontrollable. But war is not only *violent* behaviour. War is *purposeful* and *organised* violence. In other words, there is a reason for war – even if we do not agree with it. Clausewitz ([1989](#): 75) states that 'war is ... an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will'. Even though war may have a logic of its own and seem self-perpetuating, it is not an end in itself. It has a wider aim – which, says Clausewitz, is policy.

The idea of war as organised violence differentiates it from non-organised or semi-organised violence. While a street riot may involve violence, this sort of generally spontaneous activity is not a war. There are still some grey areas here – for example, the riot in the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara that followed the 2006 election result was a curious mixture of spontaneity and political purpose (and it helped to achieve a clear political result with the unseating of the prime minister-elect only days afterwards). We might also ask: at what stage does civil unrest involving violence become a civil war? Another grey area is whether we consider [terrorism](#) to be war. One approach is to regard terrorism as a means of war rather than as a separate form of it. Groups who are seeking to bring down the ruling authority in a [revolutionary](#) war may use acts of terror as part of their struggle, which may also include hit-and-run tactics and more conventional forms of organised violence. But what of groups who seem defined

by and in some ways limited to terrorism? Al-Qaeda seemed an interesting case in point here during its heyday after 9/11. Was it at war? And, if so, with whom?

Certainly the group known variously as Islamic State (IS) or Daesh has used violence in such a way as to suggest that it is engaged in a war in the Middle East. Unlike al-Qaeda, IS has used armed conflict to gain de facto control of territory in both Syria and Iraq. And it took acts resembling warfare on the part of the coalition against IS to reverse a number of these territorial gains. This response has required the coordination of armed forces from a complex group of countries – some of them more willing than others to use the military potential at their disposal.

This reminds us that, as an organised activity, war depends on the organisations designed to fight it. Three services are predominant: armies, navies and air forces. For the most part, these are maintained by the states that comprise the international system. At least in theory, [sovereign states](#) are expected to maintain a monopoly on the preparation for and use of armed force (see [Chapter 11](#)). Interstate wars that comprise organised violence involving the armed forces of two or more of these sovereign states reinforce this monopoly. But it no longer holds when challengers within states – [insurgent](#) groups, [secessionists](#) and others – resort to violence using unofficial and irregular armed forces.

Some scholars go so far as to argue that it is no longer plausible for states to prepare their armed forces for possible wars with other states or to prevent war by credible [deterrent](#) strategies. Martin van Creveld ([1991](#)) (see [Box 16.2](#)), for example, suggests that these large, cumbersome military machines are heading for extinction. Instead, in this view, future wars will be fought by irregular, non-state armed forces including paramilitary groups, organised criminal gangs and other sub-state actors. This goes hand-in-hand with his thesis that the Westphalian order of sovereign states is also passing away.

## Box 16.2: Key figures

### Martin van Creveld

Few scholars have had a larger impact on the way we think about war today than the Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld. In terms of the serious study of warfare, van Creveld's work on technology's impact on warfare and the often under-valued significance of logistics stand as important contributions. But his *On Future War* ([1991](#), also published as *The Transformation of War*) has attracted the greatest attention. Van Creveld attacks [Clausewitzian](#) war as obsolete because of the demise of the state's monopoly on armed violence. Israel's own challenges in coping with an undeclared war with sub-state actors in the occupied territories clearly had a bearing on this thesis. Some readers may find van Creveld's treatment of Clausewitz akin to the demolition of a straw man. But in a world preoccupied with transnational terrorist groups, weak states and insurgency, there is no doubting the appeal of his logic.

This critique needs to be taken seriously. We seem to live in an age of weak and even [failing states](#), unable to maintain effective armed forces, which often pose greater threats to their own civilian populations than to the adversaries they are purportedly designed to fight. If states are fragile and collapsing, then so too is their monopoly on organised violence. That has been very clear in large parts of the Middle East since the Arab Spring. And even strong states are challenged by what is often called 'asymmetric warfare' – where the nominally weaker actors (including sub-state groups who use terrorism) seem to have pinpointed chinks in Goliath's armour. Indeed, in one of its more notable observations about the contemporary international system, the administration of George W. Bush

declared that the United States ‘is now threatened less by conquering states than ... by failing ones’ (United States National Security Strategy [2002](#): 1).

But we should be wary of sweeping claims about the obsolescence of interstate violence. War may now seem unthinkable between almost any and all Western democracies, including between members of the European Union. Yet the same does not apply in Asia where, thanks to the rise of China and India and the long-standing economic weight of Japan, global power will increasingly be concentrated. Asia features a raft of states for whom the building of armed forces with the potential to wage organised violence is far from an outdated practice. At least for now, a somewhat precarious sense of balance in that part of the world is maintained by the substantial regional military presence of the United States, whose military spending constitutes a third of all of such expenditure by every country on the globe (Perlo-Freeman et al. [2016](#): 3). States in this part of the world will continue to maintain and develop organised armed forces to deter armed conflict and to fight if that deterrence fails.

## War and politics

The next part of Levy’s definition to which we turn is the notion that war is organised violence involving *political actors*. This brings to mind the most quoted statement about our subject – again from Clausewitz ([1989](#): 87) – that ‘war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means’. Rather than believing that war starts when diplomacy ceases, Clausewitz encourages us to see war as an extension of the political relationship which states (and other political actors) enjoy and endure with one another. The American strategic thinker Thomas

Schelling ([1966](#): 1–34) characterised this situation very colourfully by referring to the ‘diplomacy of violence’.

This puts questions of war at the heart of the discipline of IR – which, at least traditionally, is the study of political relationships between the key actors of the international system, namely states. And by political relationships here we mean relationships involving power: who has it and how it is distributed and used in the international system. Strategy, Lawrence Freedman ([2013](#)) tells us in an epic work, amounts to the ‘creation of power.’ And war is one means (although a highly unpleasant one) through which states – as political actors – attempt to affect the behaviour of others in the pursuit of their interests.

Clausewitz’s famous statement might be posited as an example of classical realism as it supposes a [state-centric](#) world full of self-interested actors. Rather than an end in itself, war is a servant of the political interests of these states. But we should be wary of this logic for at least two reasons. First, it appears to legitimise war, encouraging us to think of it less as the product of a faulty international system and poor institutions (as [liberals](#) like Woodrow Wilson might encourage us to believe) and more as normal behaviour. We may fall into the trap of seeing war as just another mechanism by which states seek to achieve their political aims in a world where there is a premium on self-help. Of course, this may not be an objectionable proposition in some instances. For the Allied powers in September 1939, war was not difficult to justify as a necessary means to a legitimate political end: the defeat of Nazi aggression and tyranny. But after the largely unintended catastrophe of World War I, one could argue that war can also be far from a rational decision taken to further [national interests](#).

Second, war has a habit of changing and corrupting the reasons for which it was originally fought. As Azar Gat ([1989](#): 215) has observed, for Clausewitz the political nature of war was organic as well as functional: the nature of war reflects the political nature of the society that wages it and brings it into being.

Even in its purely interstate variety, war reflects the domestic politics of the states that are fighting it. One cannot understand the frequency and the character of war between India and Pakistan since the partition of 1947 without an appreciation of the passions that these energetic societies evoke (Ganguly [2001](#)). Domestic politics can also serve to constrain a state's participation in war, as the US government of Lyndon Johnson learned in the Vietnam War era (Karnow [1994](#)) and as the Soviet government learned in Afghanistan (Evans [2005](#)). Hence, in referring to *political* actors, we mean domestic as well as international political dimensions.

Of course, with van Creveld ([1991](#)), we might argue that the political actors responsible for war are leaving the stage. Rather than seeing strong states prosecuting war, we might need to focus on sub-state actors. But we need to look more deeply at some of these supposedly non-traditional actors who are said to dominate today's warfare. Some may wage war against established states, but their aim is often to carve out a piece of the territory for themselves. Examples include the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which has operated in the Mindanao Island Group of the Philippines, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) of the mainly Christian south, whose battles with the Sudanese government, based in the mainly Muslim north, led to the establishment of the new sovereign state of South Sudan in 2011.

A similar logic applies to the role of [identity](#) as a cause of modern warfare. Using such examples as the Balkan wars, which precipitated and accompanied the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Mary Kaldor ([1999](#)) reminds us that elites can manipulate the politics of identity to justify war. These wars are very much acts of political ambition: for Milosevic in Serbia and Tudjman in Croatia, warfare was a servant, and also a product, of politics. There is not that much of a gap here from some of the independence movements which followed World War II: identity and independence are both bedfellows of

[nationalism](#) (see [Chapter 12](#)). Mao Zedong's revolutionary strategy, developed as his Red Army fought for the control of China, is a superb example of the idea of using force for explicitly political purposes and a recognition that those who wage war operate in an intensely political environment.

Of course, not all sub-state wagers of war are involved in movements of national liberation, independence or secession. Some, at least, seem to act out of rather different motivations. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the United States, a number of analysts suggested that there was a difference between old and new terrorism. In the earlier type, prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s, groups like the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) used acts of terror in a quest for limited political goals – for example, independence within a particular territory. They were avowedly political actors waging a form of internal war with their target states – in this case, with the governments of Israel and Spain respectively. But in the new terrorism, it was unclear what – if any – political aims motivated groups like al-Qaeda, which seemed interested only in causing the greatest amount of death and destruction possible. Such a group almost seemed caught up in the theatre (rather than the functionality) of violence. A related argument suggested that radical Islamist groups using terrorism were motivated by religion (often with apocalyptic worldviews) rather than by politics.

These claims deserve serious consideration, but are also open to question (Tucker [2001](#): 1–14). First, it is clear that al-Qaeda has had an interest in perpetuating mass-casualty terrorist attacks. But this does not necessarily mean that Osama bin Laden and his colleagues lacked a political agenda. Their motives appeared to have included the removal of Western and especially US forces from parts of the Middle East, and the downfall of incumbent regimes including in Saudi Arabia. Second, the distinction between religion and politics is questionable. There is no reason why political aims cannot have religious

connotations. Consider, for example, the support that the theocratic government of Iran gives to Hezbollah and other groups arraigned against Israel and the exploitation of Shia–Sunni tensions by Iran and Saudi Arabia in their support for opposing sides in Yemen’s civil conflict. Or consider IS’s quest for a caliphate in the Middle East and its use (and abuse) of a stringent theology, including for the recruitment of fighters from overseas.

Other instances of organised violence may strain the nexus between war and politics in a more resolute fashion. Some actors seem motivated by economic gain, and lack any sort of obvious political agenda. Such claims have been made about the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. For this ‘army’, organised violence seemed either an end in itself or was used for reasons of financial greed. But it is still rare for politics to be completely absent. First, such a group often needs a particular political situation in which to operate – in this case, a virtual vacuum of state power. Second, its leaders have interests in their own positions of power and in the survival of their organisation. Third, as Vinci (2005: 360–81) argues, the LRA has used violence to breed fear for political purposes. A group does not need to publish formal policy statements or be interested in setting up a government to be regarded as a political actor. Even so, for states familiar with engaging with other states, it is not easy to know how to win wars against actors whose interests, resources and tactics can seem so different.

## **War as a case of ‘between’**

This leads us to a fourth observation: that war is less like the solitary card game of patience and more like a risky game of poker. War is an activity between two or more political actors that are using force (and threats of force) to affect each

other's behaviour. The notion of war as a clash of wills, with each trying to impose themselves on the other, comes into play here. This violent interaction helps give war some of its truly horrible elements – friction, uncertainty and confusion are elevated when you are facing an intelligent opponent who is trying to do you harm.

At times, the participants in war can be more or less equivalent. This was the case on the Western Front in World War I, which led to a multi-year stalemate. It was also the case on the Eastern Front in World War II as the armed might of Germany was absorbed at great cost and then repelled by the Soviet Union. It would have been the case in an especially catastrophic sense had the United States and the Soviet Union gone to war in the nuclear age. That World War III was avoided suggests that the capacity for mutual destruction may act to prevent the use of force and that peer competitors can agree to tacit rules of the game by which they constrain the violence that might erupt between them. In this sense, as Schelling ([1960](#)) argues, war and threats of war can be treated as bargaining relationships where the sides find some sort of ugly compromise that prevents massive mutual damage (see [Box 16.3](#)).

### **Box 16.3:** Key figures

#### **Thomas Schelling**

It probably needed an unconventional economist like Thomas Schelling to show us how much war (and attempts to avoid and limit it) could resemble a bargain between self-interested strategic actors. Drawing on theories of the firm, game theory, and organisational theory, Schelling developed a theoretically appealing approach to strategy in a nuclear age where not finding a tacit agreement with the other side could mean mutual devastation. This was spelled out with particular rigour in *The*

*Strategy of Conflict* ([1960](#)). Schelling was also a pioneer of [arms-control](#) theory and later turned his hand to the study of international environmental problems. He was awarded a Nobel Prize in Economics in 2005.

But war also occurs between those who are not equals, both in size and in type. In terms of the former, we live in an age of US political and military supremacy, where the world's leading power (and the only real superpower) is likely to dwarf any state it fights – with the possible exception, some time down the track, of an undesired war with a re-emerging China. The immediate post-Cold War years were an age of unfair strategic contests between the United States and its allies on the one hand and an assortment of small [rogue states](#) on the other. These included Saddam Hussein's Iraq (twice) and Serbia. Such was the US advantage in these contests that it is a bit difficult to call them real wars in the interactive sense of the term. Indeed the United States was able to fight these wars in the way and at a time of its choosing. This bred a certain amount of over-confidence in its own power. It also went along with what might be called [unilateral](#) notions of strategy – in the sense that war was simply the application of violence to achieve one's own ends almost in the absence of anything coming back the other way. War was not a case of 'between' here.

But looking back on 2003, it might be argued that the adversaries of the United States in Iraq knew that they could not win such an asymmetrically pitched battle and waited for the moment when the United States would be most exposed – as a rather modestly sized occupying force responsible for a huge and fractious country in the post-invasion period. Something came back the other way then, and the interaction, friction and confusion of war returned. Strategy

became more like Schelling's ([1960](#): 3) notion, adapted from game theory, where 'the best course of action for each player depends on what the other players do'. Such an approach, he argues, encourages us to 'focus on the interdependence of the adversaries' decisions and on their expectations about each other's behaviour'.

Insurgent groups, as also seen in Afghanistan, represent a different type of political actor as well as a different size of actor, extending the asymmetry of the interaction even further. In general terms, states do not fare well in wars against non-state groups. Warlike acts designed to help stabilise a country so that new institutions of government may be built are fraught with difficulty. It is generally easier to use violence to destroy political order, which Ahmed Hashim ([2014](#)) depicts as a deliberate strategy on the part of IS.

The fact that wars occur between opposing and intelligent parties is one reason why the use of force remains an extremely blunt stick in international politics. Hence, while the capacity and intent to use military force may stand as the *sine qua non* of power in the international system, it is a form of power that one should be especially reluctant to unleash. The 'between' factor is an essential reason for this reluctance. Maybe some states are learning. Washington has been unwilling to get too directly involved in the Syrian civil war, and may have taken a cue from its experiences following the supposed victory in Iraq in 2003, and the unravelling of Libya that followed the NATO-led intervention there in 2011.

## **War as large scale**

Keeping wars small and under control is a risky artform, not least because it takes two sides to agree on any such limits. The escalating US commitment to

Vietnam in the 1960s, which left Hanoi largely unmoved in its resolve, is a good case of how such limits can be hard to negotiate. That failure encouraged the US view (known as the Powell Doctrine, after General Colin Powell, who later became US Secretary of State) that force should only be employed in an overwhelming fashion to achieve the objective quickly rather than through ‘a little surgical bombing or a limited attack’, which Powell argued was often followed by ‘talk of just a little escalation – more bombs, more men and women, more force’ (Powell [1992–93](#): 40). But it is important to note that Powell’s argument is against the notion of gradually intensifying war rather than limited war per se. Examples abound of the resort to limited force for limited purposes – an approach that is entirely consistent with the ends–means relationship in Clausewitz’s writing. China, for example, sought to teach Vietnam a ‘lesson’ through a limited war in 1979 (after Vietnam had invaded Cambodia to dislodge the murderous Khmer Rouge), and India and Pakistan have conducted limited wars, including one that occurred under the nuclear umbrella in Kargil in 1999.

This raises the question of how large such an exchange of armed violence needs to be before we consider it to be warfare. Partly because they need agreed data sets to test their hypotheses about the occurrence of war, a good many IR scholars in the United States have agreed on thresholds that allow them to count some events as wars and others as less than wars. The Correlates of War Project established at the University of Michigan in 1963 is one such example. As Levy ([1998](#): 141) notes, that project’s threshold of 1000 battle deaths per year as a defining requirement for a war to be counted has been adopted widely.

There are some advantages to such an approach. Generally speaking, the more extensive and costly the violence, the fewer questions there will be about whether war has in fact occurred. At one extreme, there is little doubt that World War II qualifies, with millions of battle deaths in some years. And there is no doubt that a global nuclear exchange would constitute war, although there might

not be many political scientists left to record it. But at the other extreme, what of the occasional exchange of gunfire along the Line of Control in Kashmir? Is war occurring every time this happens?

But size does not always matter – at least, not *absolute* size. The 1000 deaths per year threshold, for example, would exclude at least two conflicts in the South Pacific which have had serious consequences for small states: the civil war in the Solomon Islands and at least some portions of the armed conflict on Bougainville. Especially in light of the small populations involved in these places, just a few hundred deaths might be truly catastrophic. Indeed, using these somewhat arbitrary quantitative thresholds may allow a good number of intrastate wars to pass under our radar. What is important in establishing that war is taking place is a question of quality rather than quantity. And those qualitative factors are the ones we have discussed above – the use of armed violence between organised political actors. Whether these are superpowers with potentially millions of combatants and casualties or small rival tribes, the essence of war remains markedly similar.

### **Women in combat: The role of gender bias and myth in security policy**

**Megan Mackenzie**

Frontline combat roles have historically been described as ‘the tip of the spear’ and the first line of defence for national militaries engaged in conflict. As a result, those in combat roles are seen to hold a special role in protecting national security. Combat soldiers are often described in the media and in popular culture as being ‘tougher’, ‘braver’ and more dedicated to serving the nation. In fact, the ideal of the band of brothers – of an all-male combat unit bonding to protect each other and the nation –

is an age-old story that is familiar to most. This band of brothers story presents combat as special, dangerous and requiring a particular type of bonding that only men can attain. In other words, the band of brothers story tells us that women do not belong in combat.

Interestingly, the band of brothers ideal seems to have international traction. The vast majority of national militaries exclude women from combat for largely similar reasons. First, women are seen to be physically inferior to men, and therefore less able to fight in combat. Second, it is believed that women spoil the types of bonding and cohesion that is necessary to fight, and win, in combat. Third, several dubious claims related to women's perceived nature persist, including the assumption that women are naturally peaceful and cannot be as ruthless as men because of their ability to give birth.

Closer examination of the band of brothers story and the reasons for excluding women from combat reveal embedded gender bias and mythology. In fact, the combat exclusion for women is one of the most interesting and clear cases of sexism and gender bias in national security policy. Unpacking each of the three reasons for excluding women demonstrates this bias, and illustrates that the band of brothers story is a gendered myth.

The first, and perhaps best-known, argument for keeping women off the front lines relates to women's physical capabilities. On average, women's bodies are indeed different from men's. This difference – particularly in terms of upper body strength and body fat composition – is seen as a liability on the battlefield. Yet, on closer examination, the physical argument is less convincing than it seems. It is true that women tend not to perform as well as men on physical standards tests in the military. However, these physical tests were designed to measure men's

bodies and to test effort, not capability. That means the tests favour men's bodies. Moreover, physical standards tests are not an indicator of job performance. In other words, push-up and pull-up rates do not tell us much about a soldier's ability to do specific jobs, like drive a tank, shoot a target or improvise tactics in the heat of battle.

Research also shows that women often adapt to physically difficult tasks, such as climbing a wall or dragging a heavy object, to suit their bodies. In addition, evidence indicates that it is not the 'average' woman who joins most national militaries, and that women tend to respond better to physical training than men. The military attracts very fit women whose physical abilities improve drastically with training. Finally, when it comes to the physical argument, there is no evidence that combat roles require different or more rigorous physical capabilities than any other military role. In fact, given that in non-conventional warfare it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the 'front' and 'rear' lines, or between combat or 'support' soldiers, it makes sense to have all soldiers held to equal and job-relevant physical standards.

The second argument used to justify excluding women from combat relates to combat cohesion. The argument is twofold: combat requires unique and intense bonding between soldiers, and women spoil this bonding and are incapable of joining the band of brothers. According to this logic, the band of brothers actually requires the exclusion of women in order to operate effectively. Like the physical case, critical examination of this cohesion argument reveals clear gender bias.

Certainly cohesion and teamwork is an important element of military culture. However, there is no evidence that combat units require greater cohesion than other military units. Research does not support the claim that women ruin cohesion. In fact, research indicates that more diverse

military units tend to make better and more cautious decisions on the battlefield. By contrast, homogenous units can fall into 'group think' and fail to critically challenge one another.

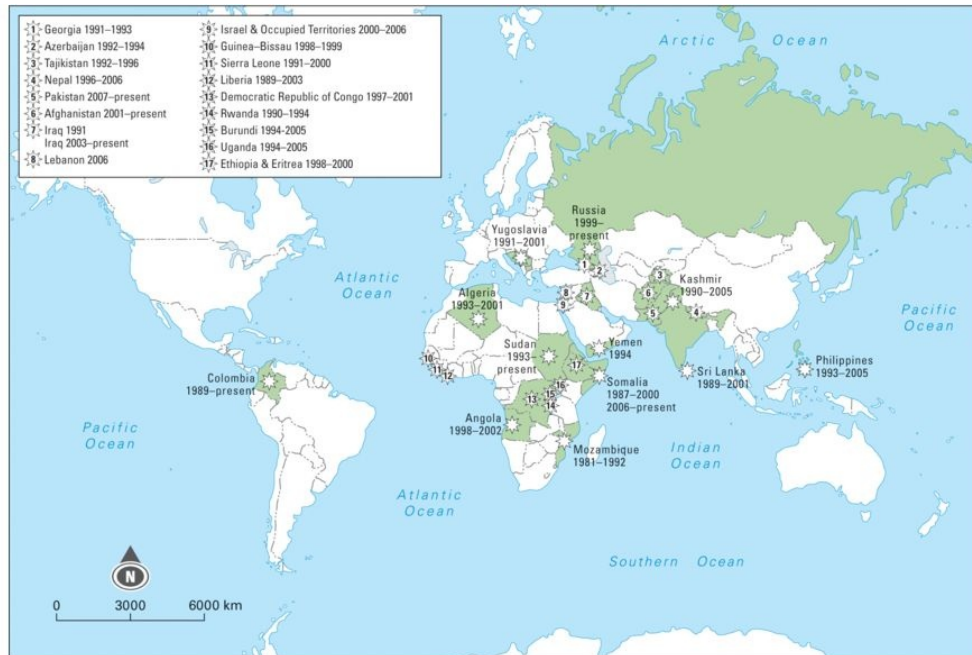
Finally, we have the range of claims centred around emotions related to women in combat, including the belief that women are more nurturing and less able to 'pull the trigger'; the assertion that the public has a different emotional response to women's deaths on the battlefield, and therefore their participation in combat may impact support for war; concerns (and many misunderstandings) about women's bodies, including pregnancy, menstruation and hormone fluctuations; and the belief that men's 'natural' position in society is to protect women. These claims about emotion are much more difficult to pin down, and none can be supported clearly with research, yet they often dominate the debate on women in combat. Moreover, objective arguments about women's physical capability or their impact on cohesion are often tied more to these types of emotion-based or 'gut reactions' regarding women's 'rightful' place in war. In other words, emotional reactions to women often trump evidence-based research about their performance and capability to serve in combat roles.

The reality for many national militaries is that women have been fighting and serving in combat situations throughout history. There is no imaginary line in war that protects women, but the barriers excluding them from officially serving in combat roles often prevent them from being promoted at the same rates as men. In turn, the issue of women in combat matters, because it illustrates the power of gender bias and myth in security policy. It also matters because it is a clear example of a policy that limits women and may actually negatively impact national security and military capability.

## Conclusion

If Napoleon and Clausewitz had been cryogenically frozen before their deaths and were revived today, they would likely be amazed by many of the features of contemporary warfare. They would probably marvel at what the microchip had done for modern weapon systems. Their jaws might drop as they considered the implications of including air and space as environments for battle. The intercontinental ballistic missile and the nuclear warhead, the air–land battle doctrine used by the United States in the Middle East and the corresponding idea of air–sea battle in Asia, the possibility of instantaneous and direct communication between commander and soldier, and the depth of the modern battlefield would all be new.

But having absorbed the implications of all of these new characteristics of war, Europe’s greatest strategist and strategic thinker respectively might argue that not all that much has really changed. War is still as confusing and as destructive (if not more so) as it was in their day. It still reflects the political interests of the actors who wage it and the moods and energies of the societies in which they are based. As a clash of wills, war retains a logic of its own, even if it now wears rather different clothing. If correct, this conclusion implies that the title of this chapter, ‘The Changing Character of Warfare’, deserves to be followed by a rather large question-mark.



**Figure 16.3** Wars since 1990

**Source:** Based on slightly revised data from ‘Armed conflicts dataset’, compiled jointly by the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo and the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. Available at [www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/UCDP-PRIO](http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/UCDP-PRIO).

## Discussion questions

**16.1** What is war? Is there agreement about what it is?

**16.2** Is Clausewitz’s theory of war still relevant to today’s world? How have thinkers argued it should change?

**16.3** To what extent does technology change war?

**16.4** Is terrorism a form of war? What is at stake in describing it as such?

**16.5** How do we stop today’s wars? Why did the major powers struggle to stop Syria’s civil war?

### *Further reading*

Clausewitz, Carl von 1989 [1832], *On war*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *A classic and indispensable treatise that shaped modern understandings of war and strategy.*

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Freedman, Lawrence 1998, *The revolution in strategic affairs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Institute for Strategic Studies. *An excellent analysis that emphasises political rather than technological factors in contemporary warfare.*

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Kaldor, Mary 1999, *New and old wars: Organised violence in a global era*, Stanford, CT: Stanford University Press. *A controversial account of how globalisation has changed the character of warfare.*

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Simpson, Emile 2012, *War from the ground up: Twenty-first century combat as politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A compelling reframing of Clausewitz's thinking on war and politics based on the author's experience in Afghanistan.*

# The ethics and laws of war



**Alex J. Bellamy**

[Introduction](#)

[When is it right to fight \(\*jus ad bellum\*\)?](#)

[How should war be waged \(\*jus in bello\*\)?](#)

[\*Jus ad bellum\* dilemma: Pre-emptive self-defence](#)

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## Introduction

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the ethics and laws of [war](#) in three parts. The first section outlines what [international law](#) and the ‘[just war](#)’ tradition have to say about recourse to force, the second section explores the conduct of war and the final section explores two recent issues as examples of moral and legal debate: the legitimacy of pre-emptive self-defence and the use of suicide car bombs.

War is an almost ubiquitous part of human history. For as long as there have been distinctive human groups, there has been organised violence – war – between them (Gat [2006](#)). But because endemic violence between communities had detrimental effects on whole civilisations – inhibiting demographic growth, for example – many developed rules and customs to limit and control the extent of violence and determine the victors. As Ian Clark ([2016](#)), Stephen Neff and others have pointed out, ‘war’ is not just the practice of organised violence but a particular form of organised violence ordered by customs, ethics and – more recently – legal rules. Thus, although some realists argue that there is no place for morality in war – reflecting the views of the Union Army’s General Sherman who, during the US Civil War, maintained that ‘war is all hell’ and the only moral course was to do everything possible to succeed – the fact is that the concept of war itself is deeply imbued with moral and legal arguments. Indeed, Sherman’s argument is itself a moral argument about war. Others would go further. Those that Martin Ceadel ([1987](#)) described as ‘warists’ – among them nineteenth-century nationalists, twentieth-century fascists and twenty-first-century jihadists – see war itself as a moral good.

Today, questions about when it is legitimate to go to war and how war must be conducted are central to public and political debates, and play a significant role in policy-making and military decision-making. Indeed, it is war’s character as a rule-governed activity that demarcates it from other forms of violence, such as raiding and terrorism. Decisions to invade countries like Iraq or Afghanistan, intervene – or not – in major civil wars such as those in Libya and Syria, participate in wars such as Vietnam and World War I, or send [peacekeepers](#) to South Sudan or Mali are only partly strategic choices. Indeed, the strategic question of whether we *can* achieve our aims through force is secondary to the question of whether we *ought* to do so. Likewise, decisions about how to fight

are shaped by our politics and our ethics. Ethics lie at the heart of the business of war.

## **When is it right to fight (*jus ad bellum*)?**

Some ways of thinking about the ethics of war imply that war itself is always a good thing. Fascists, for example, valorised the martial values associated with war because they strengthened societies and forged internal cohesion. Others, such as contemporary realists, maintain that decisions about whether or not to wage war ought to be based solely on prudence and judgements about whether the national interest will be advanced. But even prudential judgements are affected by ethics. Not only must leaders be mindful of their own ethical commitments and those of the people they represent; they should be mindful of how their actions will be received by others, since this will influence how third parties react. Act ethically, and outsiders may be more willing to join a coalition and share the cost; act unethically, and the reverse might happen. Of course, powerful states are better able to bear the costs of unethical behaviour than are weak states, but their ability to do so is not inexhaustible. For example, the United States was forced to bear the cost of its controversial 2003 invasion of Iraq to the detriment of its domestic economy, national debt and global military standing.

How are leaders to know whether they are acting ethically or not? International law provides a useful starting point, since in many ways this is a practical manifestation of a common moral position negotiated by the world's many states. Contemporary international law on the use of force is based upon the [UN Charter](#). Prior to the Charter (which was agreed in 1945), it was widely considered that [states](#) had an inherent right to wage war whenever they believed

that they had a case for doing so, be it to defend themselves, protect their interests or claim territory. There were prior efforts to limit this right. The League of Nations Covenant (1919) demanded that states resort to war only after undertaking non-binding arbitration. Through the Kellogg–Briand Pact (1928), some 62 states renounced war as an instrument of national policy altogether. Yet these efforts were swept away by the rise of fascism and reassertion of the state's right to war in the 1930s (see [Chapter 9](#)).

After the horrors of World War II, it was agreed that this regime was too permissive, and that war should be outlawed. Thus Article 2(4) of the UN Charter explicitly forbids the use or threat of force in international relations. This is considered a fundamental rule of international relations, from which there are only two exceptions: first, all states have an inherent right to self-defence when they are attacked, set out by Article 51 of the Charter; and second, because 'it had become clear that military power was necessary not only to the *establishment* of peace, but also to the *preservation* of peace' (Howard [2001](#): 73), the UN Charter contained a mechanism for the use of force against those who threatened international peace and security. The United Nations' primary body for [peace](#) and security issues, the Security Council, has a right under Article 39 of the Charter to authorise collective enforcement action. To pass a so-called 'Chapter VII' resolution, the Council needs to identify a threat to international peace and security, nine of the fifteen Council members must vote in favour, and none of the permanent five (P5) members (the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China and France) can vote against it. This gives the P5 effective veto on collective action and ensures that the United Nations cannot pit itself against one of the great powers. While the veto can inhibit collective action, as it did in relation to the Syrian civil war (2011–ongoing) it also inhibits the potential escalation of crises, keeps the great powers at the table, and allows them continue to cooperate on some issues even while they disagree on others.

Several contemporary ‘just war’ writers have tended to criticise the UN Charter system for forbidding aggressive war and downplaying the role of justice in determining a war’s legitimacy. As James Turner Johnson ([1999](#): 57) argues, labelling a war as ‘aggressive’ does not resolve the question of whether or not it is just, yet the UN Charter makes precisely that presumption. The Charter’s drafters chose this highly restrictive model to help prevent future World Wars. The key to conflict prevention, they believed, was to remove any ambiguity in the legal framework by building a ‘presumption against aggressive war’ into the Charter. This presumption may have contributed towards the steady decline of interstate war since 1945, a trend that began to move in the opposite direction after 2011. It has also produced some perverse effects, however. In 1979, Vietnam invaded Cambodia to remove Pol Pot, a genocidal dictator whose regime murdered at least two million Cambodians. The presumption against aggressive war forced Vietnam to justify its invasion by claiming that it was acting in self-defence, which was rejected by many states, which imposed sanctions on Vietnam, demanded its immediate withdrawal from Cambodia and even offered indirect support to the *genocidaires* (Wheeler [2000](#): 78–110). Likewise, from 2014, this same presumption has forced the United States to justify the bombing of [Islamic State \(IS\)](#) positions in Syria by reference to Iraq’s right to self-defence, since there was no other legal basis for the action. The issue also presents itself more broadly in relation to the Syrian civil war since there is literally nothing that the Syrian government could do to its people, including poisoning them en masse with gas, that would make lawful an armed intervention to stop such action without the authorisation of the UN Security Council, which would be blocked by the Syrian regime’s friend and ally, Russia.

This tension between law’s presumption against aggressive war and an ethical ‘presumption against injustice’ (Johnson’s term) is arguably the central dilemma of *jus ad bellum* today, and it is why many ethicists argue that law

alone is an insufficient basis for moral judgement. Sometimes, they argue, morality may demand actions that are unlawful. The moral rules governing recourse to force found in the 'just war' tradition, which stretches back to early Christianity and was developed into a formal doctrine by St Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century and subsequent canon lawyers and legal theorists, are more permissive than contemporary international law in that they allow war in a wider number of instances and, specifically, do not carry with them a *prima facie* presumption against the first use of force (or aggressive war). But these moral principles also impose specific conditions on the use of force. There are three types of rule: substantive, prudential and procedural. *Jus ad bellum* contains four substantive criteria (see [Box 17.1](#)).

#### **Box 17.1: Terminology**

##### **Jus ad bellum criteria**

##### **1 Substantive criteria**

- right intention
- just cause
- proportionality of ends
- last resort

##### **2 Prudential checks**

##### **3 Procedural requirements.**

The first criterion is *right intention*. Individuals must wage war for the common good, not for self-aggrandisement or because they hate the enemy. Right intention is seldom discussed nowadays, and some scholars argue that it should be dropped from our list of criteria because it is not clear why actors must have right intentions when they wage war (Brown [2002](#): 108–9). But this argument overlooks the role that right intentions play in the justification of killing itself. The just war tradition insists that a soldier's intention is absolutely critical because killing for personal gain out of hatred or envy is akin to murder, and therefore morally wrong. When soldiers kill, they must do so only because they are intent on defending the common good or righting a wrong.

The second substantive rule is that war may only be waged for a *just cause*. This is usually limited to self-defence, defence of others, restoration of peace, defence of rights and the punishment of wrongdoers. Just cause is often viewed in absolute terms: a combatant either has a just cause or they do not. Today, this tendency is supported by legal [positivism](#), which holds that actors either comply with the law or violate it (Walzer [1977](#): 59). However, since Vitoria ([1991](#)) in the sixteenth century, most 'just war' writers have separated objective or true justice (knowable to God) from subjective justice (knowable to humans). Thus wars can appear just on both sides. There are two ways of coping with this. First, as Vitoria argued, princes should show due care before they wage war. They should seek advice from learned people and listen to the opponent's arguments. Second, the just cause rule should be understood in relative terms. It is not a matter of either having or not having a just cause, but of having more or less of one. Sometimes this is labelled 'sufficient cause': do we have a sufficiently just cause to legitimise the actions we plan to take? This, of course, requires an assessment of two factors: the reason for war and the intended strategy.

*Proportionality of ends* asks whether the overall harm likely to be caused by the war is less than that caused by the wrong that is being righted. Vitoria

(1991) suggested that proportionality played a significant role in judgements about the legitimacy of war. While war was legitimate to right wrongs, not all wrongs legitimised war. Some wrongs were neither grievous nor widespread enough to legitimise the inevitable evils that war entailed. On this view, proportionality is more than a prudential calculation. After all, prudence is always viewed from the eye of the beholder. A prudential account of proportionality would ask only whether the likely costs to us are greater than the likely benefits. Proportionality in the Vitorian sense requires a calculation of all the likely costs.

The final substantive rule is that of *last resort*. Is the use of force the only, or most proportionate, way that the wrong is likely to be righted? One often finds that last resort is taken to mean the physical exhaustion of every means short of force. This is not the case. If it did, force would never be licit because one can always continue to negotiate, right up until everybody is dead. Instead, last resort demands that actors carefully evaluate all the different strategies that might bring about the desired end, selecting force if it appears to be the only feasible strategy for securing those ends.

Prudential criteria impose important checks on decisions to wage what would otherwise be justifiable wars. The principal prudential check is *reasonable chance of success*. This criterion holds that as war always entails some degree of evil, it is wrong to wage war for a justifiable purpose unless those instigating it can reasonably expect to prevail. From a [realist](#) perspective, prudence includes both the overall likelihood of success and calculations about the costs of success. In other words, a state may be able to prevail but the cost of prevailing may be higher than it wishes to pay to satisfy a particular just cause. Because, from a realist perspective, political leaders have a primary moral responsibility to the welfare of their own citizens, they may not sacrifice that welfare unless their vital interests or fundamental values are at stake.

The third type of constraint covers the procedural requirements of *right authority* and *proper declaration*. In the Middle Ages, canon lawyers and scholastic intellectuals resolved the first question in favour of sovereign princes. In the modern era, only those leaders with no clear superior could legitimately authorise war. This translated into [sovereign states](#), and from the eighteenth until the mid-twentieth centuries, states were effectively given a free hand to authorise war whenever they saw fit. This right was heavily restricted, however, by the 1945 UN Charter, as we saw earlier. The question of who has the right to authorise war remains a moot point today. Positive law suggests that only states under attack and the UN Security Council have this right. Others hold that individual states and coalitions may legitimately wage war in other instances. Furthermore, it is widely accepted today that other actors, such as national liberation movements, may also legitimately wage war in some circumstances.

The requirement for proper declaration had its origins in the Roman system. During the Middle Ages, the declaration requirement supported the right authority test because only those princes with the [power](#) to declare war and not be removed from power had the right to wage war. The requirement also forced those about to embark on war to clearly state their case, providing an opportunity for peaceful restitution. Nowadays, the declaration can serve a third purpose: it clearly marks the transition from peace to war, and hence the type of legal rules that ought to be applied.

## **How should war be waged (*jus in bello*)?**

The legal and moral rules governing the conduct of war are much more clearly defined than the *jus ad bellum* rules (see [Box 17.1](#)), and today there is even an International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute those charged with war crimes,

crimes against humanity and [genocide](#) in cases where the host state is either unwilling or unable to prosecute offenders.

[International society](#)'s first attempt to grapple with *jus in bello* issues after World War II came in the form of the four [Geneva conventions](#) of 1949. The International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC) convened a meeting of experts in 1947, which produced a draft convention that was then put to states at a conference in Geneva in 1949. Although there was considerable agreement on the fundamentals, such as the need to afford further protection to non-combatants and prisoners of war, and the need for some sort of oversight, a number of issues proved contentious. The ICRC's draft had envisaged a convention that applied to all forms of armed conflict, but many states – particularly newly [decolonised](#) states and colonial powers – did not want protection afforded to rioters, [guerrillas](#) and terrorists. On the other hand, countries that recently had been occupied by the [fascists](#) worried that a rule giving states a free hand to suppress local insurgents could be used by unjust aggressors to justify brutality towards the host population, and insisted that the convention recognise that partisans had liberated parts of Europe. The result was a compromise. Common Article 3 committed parties in 'non-international' wars to respect [human rights](#) without specifying any particular privileges for insurgents, and the Convention on the Protection of Civilians (Convention IV) offered comprehensive legal protection to non-combatants in occupied territories. The upshot, however, was that the victims of international wars received more protection from the laws of war than the victims of [civil wars](#).

The Geneva conventions comprised a comprehensive code of *jus in bello*, granting wide protection to non-combatants, the wounded and sick and prisoners of war. By the 1980s, it was widely held that the conventions had the status of customary law binding on all. Consequently, grave breaches of the conventions were universally punishable, though there remained no instrument for punishing

perpetrators. Moreover, within a decade or so of their enactment, it became clear that there were significant gaps in the conventions. Not least, there was no prohibition on indiscriminate bombardment and no proportionality clause in the four conventions (Best [1994](#): 106–7). Furthermore, decolonisation and the overwhelming preponderance of internal wars created an impetus for extending the protections afforded in international wars to internal conflicts. Between 1974 and 1977, states returned to Geneva to negotiate additions to the conventions.

### **Box 17.2:** Key texts

#### **International humanitarian law: Some important documents**

##### *Hague Conference (1899)*

- Convention (II) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land
- Declaration on the Launching of Projectiles and Explosives from Balloons
- Declaration on the Use of Projectiles the Object of Which is the Diffusion of Asphyxiating or Deleterious Gases

##### *Hague Conference (1907)*

- Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land

##### *Geneva Conventions (1949)*

- Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field

- Convention (II) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of the Armed Forces at Sea
- Convention (III) Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War
- Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War

*Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention*

- Additional Protocol (I) Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflict (1977)
- Additional Protocol (II) Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (1977)
- Additional Protocol (III) Relating to the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem (2005)

The first Geneva Protocol significantly extended the protection afforded to non-combatants. It insisted that attacks be strictly limited to military objectives, defining these as ‘those objects which by their nature, location, purpose or use make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage’ (Article 52, Protocol I). In other words, soldiers were forbidden from attacking non-combatants or their property, though so-called ‘dual-use’ facilities remained lawful targets. Soldiers were also obliged to evaluate the proportionality of their attacks, with Article 51(5) outlawing

attacks on military objects that ‘may be expected to cause’ excessive civilian casualties. The Protocol also forbade the indirect targeting of non-combatants through attacks calculated to destroy vital civilian infrastructure and cause starvation. The Protocol’s principle of discrimination provided the catalyst for conventions banning weapons considered inherently indiscriminate. For example, the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons and subsequent amendments banned booby traps, lasers and weapons that injure by creating fire and heat, on the grounds of inherent indiscriminance. The 2000 Convention prohibiting the manufacture, sale and use of landmines was also justified on this basis. Of course, the question of discrimination made it problematic for the nuclear powers to adopt the Protocol because it is very difficult to see how nuclear weapons could be used discriminately. Despite the non-signature of states such as the United States, United Kingdom and Russia, owing to concerns about the legality of their nuclear arsenals, all three have indicated that they believe the Protocol to be binding and that the legality of the use of nuclear weapons is indeterminate – a position confirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the *Legality of Nuclear Weapons* case.

Protocol II regulated how states might respond to internal insurgents. Above all, it reinforced the basic idea behind human rights law that states were not free to treat their own citizens however they liked, though Protocol II afforded states considerable latitude in deciding whether or not a particular insurgency could be labelled an ‘armed conflict’, thereby bringing the Protocol into play. Nevertheless, some states – particularly the United States – complained that Protocol II gave too many rights to ‘terrorists’ and tied the hands of states combating them.

Through the Geneva conventions and protocols and other instruments such as the Genocide Convention (1948) and Convention Against Torture (1987), a comprehensive system of positive law designed to moderate the use of force and

protect non-combatants has been created. The system did little, however, to deter despots such as Pol Pot and Idi Amin from systematically massacring non-combatants. Furthermore, in the so-called ‘new wars’ of the 1990s, the direct targeting of non-combatants once again became a war strategy. As a result of this seemingly growing impunity before the law, the question of enforcement was raised once again, culminating in the creation of the ICC in 2002.

The moral restrictions on the use of force are very similar to the legal prohibitions. There are three basic rules: first, the principle of discrimination – non-combatants must never be deliberately attacked; second, the principle of proportionality – military targets may only be attacked when their military value outweighs the foreseeable destruction that will result; and third, combatants must not use prohibited weapons or conduct themselves in ways that violate the laws of war.

Underpinning the *jus in bello* is the doctrine of double-effect, first articulated in the thirteenth century by St Thomas Aquinas. According to Aquinas, the doctrine holds that any act may have two consequences: one that is intended and one that is not. Even if we intend good, our actions may cause unintended negative consequences. According to the doctrine of double-effect, unintended negative consequences are excusable if four conditions are satisfied:

- 1 The desired end must be good in itself.
- 2 Only the good effect is intended.
- 3 The good effect must not be produced by means of the evil effect.
- 4 The good of the good effect must outweigh the evil of the evil effect (proportionality) (Ramsey [1961](#): 43, 48–9).

There is a major flaw with this rendition and double-effect injunctions ought to be treated sceptically. It is worth quoting Walzer ([1977](#): 156) at length here:

Simply not to intend the death of civilians is too easy ... What we look for in such cases is some sign of a positive commitment to save civilian lives. Not merely to apply the proportionality rule and kill no more civilians than is militarily necessary ... Civilians have a right to something more. And if saving civilian lives means risking soldiers' lives, the risk must be accepted.

The idea that it is possible to separate intent and act, particularly when referring to individuals in combat, has often been criticised. Critics argue that there is no practical difference between *intending* the deaths of non-combatants near military targets and merely *foreseeing* it (McKeogh [2002](#)). According to Walzer ([1977](#)) and the contemporary laws of war, although we can never fully know an actor's intentions, we can ascertain something approximating intentions by focusing on actions. To display an intention not to harm non-combatants, combatants must demonstrate *both* that they did not deliberately seek to kill non-combatants and that they have taken every reasonable precaution to minimise the likelihood of harming non-combatants (due care). However, there remain significant differences over *how much* additional risk should be accepted. These debates cannot be resolved in the abstract, but only through empirical assessments of individual cases.

The remainder of the chapter outlines two important contemporary debates, one in relation to recourse to force and the second in relation to the conduct of war.

### ***Jus ad bellum* dilemma: Pre-emptive self-defence**

After the 9/11 attacks, the United States and many of its allies put forward a case for pre-emptive self-defence. Thus the National Security Strategy presented by the United States in 2002 insisted that:

[G]iven the goals of [rogue states](#) and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threat, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first (United States [2002](#)).

This doctrine was condemned by many states, especially in Asia and the Middle East, and by opponents of the government in the United States and elsewhere, but is it illegal and/or unjust?

Since 1945, interpretations of Article 51 of the UN Charter have tended to fall into one of two camps: restrictionist and counter-restrictionist. Restrictionists insist that Article 51 expressly rules out pre-emption, arguing that states have a right to use force in self-defence only after an armed attack has occurred. They argue that if these limits were loosened, states would be encouraged to abuse the right to self-defence, eroding the distinction between aggression and defence (Cassese [1986](#): 515–16). Although there is evidence that the Charter's drafters intended Article 51 to provide only a limited right of self-defence, the idea that a state should wait to be attacked before taking measures to defend its citizens has been criticised widely.

Counter-restrictionists argue that Article 51 does not diminish a state's inherent right to pre-emptive self-defence. There are at least three justifications for this view. First, Article 51 endorses a state's *inherent* right to self-defence, which is said to include a right of pre-emption. Second, states have tended to judge pre-emption on the merits of each case. When the threat is demonstrably imminent, international society has shown itself willing to tolerate pre-emption. The paradigmatic case of this was the world's reaction to Israel's 1967 pre-emptive attack on Egypt. Although some states condemned Israel, many others accepted that it was necessary for Israel to use force to defend itself (Gray [2000](#):

112–13). Finally, there is a strong tradition of moral thinking in favour of pre-emption. Historically, prominent writers like Grotius and Pufendorf in the seventeenth century and Vattel in the eighteenth century have tended to identify a limited right of pre-emption.

The balance of argument suggests a right of self-defence that permits pre-emption in some cases but forbids attacks before a threat has become imminent. In what situations is pre-emption justifiable? Where do we draw the line between pre-emption and prevention? We can begin to answer these questions by considering the exchange of diplomatic notes between the United Kingdom and United States concerning the sinking of the *Caroline* in 1837 ([Box 17.3](#)).

### **Box 17.3:** Case study

#### **The *Caroline* affair**

In 1837, there was an armed insurrection against British rule in Canada. The rebels used a US-owned ship, the *Caroline*, to transport supplies from the US side of the Niagara River. On 29 December 1837, Canadian troops loyal to Britain boarded the ship, killed several US citizens, set the ship alight and allowed it to drift over the Niagara Falls. At the time of the attack the *Caroline* was docked on the US side of the border, not in its usual port on the Canadian side. The United States protested against the attack, claiming that its [sovereignty](#) had been violated, but the British insisted that they were exercising their right to self-defence. The British defended their action by blaming the United States for failing to prevent the use of its territory by the Canadian rebels, and justified the attack as ‘a necessity of self-defence and self-preservation’. Not surprisingly, the United States rejected this argument, insisting that the level of threat that could justify ‘hot pursuit’ must be ‘imminent, and

extreme, and involving impending destruction’. In 1840, the US government invited the British government to apologise for the incident and pay compensation in return for the dismissal of charges against a soldier imprisoned in connection with the incident. The British minister agreed immediately and despatched an apologetic note to the US government. In an 1842 reply to the British, the US Secretary of State, Daniel Webster, explained that for the claim of self-defence to be justifiable, Britain was required to ‘show a necessity of self-defence, instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation’. The action taken must also involve ‘nothing unreasonable or excessive; since the act, justified by the necessity of self-defence, must be limited by that necessity and kept clearly within it’ (see Bellamy [2006](#): 161–2).

According to the *Caroline* case, in order to invoke a right of pre-emption, a state has to demonstrate (1) the imminence of an attack, (2) the necessity of pre-emption and (3) the proportionality of its intended response.

States therefore have a limited right of pre-emption in cases that satisfy these three criteria. Jurists worry, with good reason, that expanding the right beyond the *Caroline* formula would blur the boundary between legitimate defence and unjust aggression. In the post-9/11 world, we are confronted with a tricky dilemma – defining what ‘imminence’ means in relation to terrorism. As George W. Bush (2002b) put it, when it comes to terrorism, ‘we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud’. One way of rethinking ‘imminence’ without undermining the legal and moral balance would be to suggest that an attack is imminent if the enemy has

demonstrated an intention to attack and has acquired the means to do so. In relation to terrorism, this might suggest that states are entitled to use force to pre-empt an attack even if they do not know the precise timing and location of an expected attack. It is imperative, however, that those using force in this way provide compelling evidence of the target's intent to attack and ability to do so.

### ***Jus in bello* dilemma: Suicide car bombs**

As Iraqi government forces began to enter the city of Mosul in October 2016, intent on liberating it from IS, they were confronted with a new threat: a wave of suicide car bombings. IS fighters hid among the civilian population and, disguised as civilians, drove civilian cars loaded with explosives into military columns – sometimes with devastating effects. On one occasion, a taxi approached a government army position at speed; warnings were shouted, but the taxi continued its course. Fearing a car bomb, the soldiers opened fire. The taxi driver was killed. He was unarmed and had no bomb. This type of scenario has been a common occurrence in Iraq since 2003. Many civilians have been killed at checkpoints and in other circumstances in this way.

The letter of the law might suggest that the killing of the taxi driver was a war crime and there would seem to be a *prima facie* case that it is immoral to shoot taxi drivers. The Geneva Protocols insist that force may be directed only against combatants. They also insist that combatants take 'all feasible precautions' to protect non-combatants from harm. In situations where there is doubt as to whether a target is a combatant or a civilian, the law stipulates that soldiers must assume that the target is civilian and react to it accordingly. But how much additional risk must soldiers bear in order to determine the proper identify – civilian or soldier – of a target? Here, the law becomes somewhat

contradictory, for it also prohibits soldiers from disguising themselves as civilians in order to attack their enemy. So one could argue that IS is morally responsible for the taxi driver's death because it wilfully blurred the distinction between soldiers and civilians. One might also argue that until the contents of the taxi were known, there was no way of determining whether the driver was a soldier or a combatant and that in the context of the struggle for Mosul, where taxis were indeed weaponised, it might be reasonable for the soldiers to have assumed that a taxi driving towards an armed column in a combat would be more likely to be a combatant than non-combatant, thus reducing the ambiguity. But the logic here is complex, contradictory and muddled.

Through its doctrine of double-effect, the just war tradition gives us some basis for making a judgement. Recall that double-effect excuses the foreseeable but unintentional killing of civilians provided that four criteria are satisfied. The first is that the desired effect be good in itself. This is satisfied in this case since the soldiers sought only to neutralise a potential incoming threat. The second is that only the good effect is intended. Again, this would be satisfied since the soldiers intended only to defend themselves from a suicide bomb and not to kill an unarmed taxi driver. The third is seemingly more difficult, since it holds that the good effect must not be produced by means of the evil effect and the death of the taxi driver did enable the good effect. However, we must see this from the perspective of the soldiers, who did not know at the time that they were firing at a taxi driver but instead believed themselves to be targeting a suicide bomber. Once that is remembered, the 'good effect' (neutralisation of the bomb threat) cannot be said to have resulted from the 'bad' (killing of the taxi driver). The fourth criteria is that the good of the good effect must outweigh the evil of the evil effect. This again may be a difficult criterion to fulfil, especially if the case is taken in isolation. However, if we see this case as just one small component of a broader IS campaign of suicide bombings in defence of Mosul, and recognise

that were the Iraqi army unable to offer counter-measures to this threat, this would have jeopardised the success of the overall mission, it is possible to see how the overall good achieved might outweigh the evil effects. We should also add in the moral principle of ‘due care’ set out by Walzer. Much here hinges on whether the soldiers issued sufficient warnings before opening fire. In the footage that was shown of this incident, multiple – if somewhat confused and chaotic – warnings were issued.

Beyond demonstrating the sheer complexity of the moral and legal reasoning involved in untangling a case like this, this example highlights two other important considerations when making moral judgements about the conduct of war. First, soldiers have to make life-and-death decisions quickly. On the battlefield, there is no time for weighing up options and the cost of getting it wrong could be immense. In this case, dozens of soldiers and civilians could have been killed had the taxi been a suicide bomb. Soldiers have to make the weightiest of moral decisions in the shortest of timeframes. Second, decision-making is done in conditions of imperfect information. Indeed, that is an understatement. As Joanna Bourke ([1999](#)) has shown, the battlefield is a confused, confusing and highly kinetic environment. The ethics of the conduct of war is an ethics not for the classroom, but one that has to be fit for use on the battlefield.

## Conclusion

Without ethical and legal constraints on both the decision to wage it (*jus ad bellum*) and its conduct (*jus in bello*), war is nothing more than the application of brute force, logically indistinguishable from mass murder. Today, there is a well-developed set of moral and legal rules governing the use of force, and

international institutions designed to enforce them. It is the ever-present danger of the descent into barbarism that makes the ethics and laws of war so important today; in democracies especially, every individual has a responsibility to use their own judgement to interrogate the morality of violence employed in their name. The moral principles described in this chapter do not provide answers; they simply set out ways of having meaningful conversations about the myriad dilemmas presented by war. These are not idle or unimportant debates because they determine not only the future trajectory of politicians' careers but also the future life-chances of countless thousands, if not millions, of people.

## **Discussion questions**

**17.1** What is the relationship between the 'just war' tradition and the laws of war?

**17.2** In what ways should the 'just war' tradition be reformed to bring it up to date?

**17.3** What moral problems are presented by insurgency warfare and suicide bombing? How might they be overcome?

**17.4** Is aggressive war always wrong?

**17.5** Is it fair that both the just side and the unjust side in war have to abide by the same rules?

**17.6** Does the 'just war' tradition serve to limit war or enable it by providing moral justifications for killing?

*Further reading*

Bellamy, Alex 2006, *Just wars: From Cicero to Iraq*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *A study of the just war tradition that maps its history and the contours of recent debates.*

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Best, Geoffrey 1994, *War and law since 1945*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. *The most comprehensive account of international humanitarian law since 1945.*

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Clark, Ian 2016, *Waging war: A new philosophical introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A sophisticated study of the ways in which war is understood, waged and ethically examined.*

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Johnson, J.T. 1999, *Morality and contemporary warfare*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. *An excellent account of 'just war' thinking grounded in the tradition's history.*

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Walzer, Michael 1977, *Just and unjust wars: A philosophical argument with historical illustrations*, New York: Basic Books. *A modern classic account of the just war tradition.*

# International law



**Sarah Percy**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the role of international law in world politics. It begins with a discussion of the content of international law, explaining the sources of law and how we identify them. Where does law come from, and where are legal problems solved at the international level? It then addresses the question of why the study of international law is foundational to the study of international relations. The chapter offers two answers to this question, which it explores in

turn. First, one of the central debates in International Relations theory – whether or not states pursue their national interest unchecked by rules – is at its heart a debate about international law. Realist theories of international relations have dismissed international law as having no real influence on state behaviour, arguing instead that ‘might equals right’: states will follow the law when it is in their interests, and will disregard it in all other cases. Other theories of international relations dispute this position, and argue that law is at the very least central to international activity, if not foundational to it. Second, the study of international law is also important because law is at the heart of many international disputes today. The chapter concludes by considering two examples of ‘law in action’: the legal decision regarding Chinese activities in the South China Sea and the contemporary debate over membership in the International Criminal Court.

## **What is international law?**

When we speak of international law, to what are we referring? Hedley Bull ([1977](#): 122) defines international law as ‘a body of rules which binds states and other agents in world politics in their relations with one another and is considered to have the status of law’. When international law makes the news, it is often because of a major political crisis or event, such as the use of chemical weapons, the presence of war crimes or the invasion of one state by another without UN authorisation. However, as Bull’s definition reveals, international law governs almost every facet of international life, from the mundane to the complex.

To provide an example, imagine a traveller setting off on an international journey from New York to Sydney. Almost every step of the way, the traveller’s

journey is influenced by international law. The taxi the traveller takes to the airport, like all cars, is safer because of international regulation for motor vehicles. She is able to know the exact time in order to make her flight, and know the time in Sydney on arrival because time and time zones are established in international law. The aircraft on which she flies is similarly regulated for safety, and a variety of international conventions exist to reduce the likelihood of hijacking, terrorist attack or violence at the airport. She can leave the United States and enter Australia with relative ease because she has a passport, the rules for the use of which are established by international law. If our traveller encounters a problem while she is away, international law ensures that she has the opportunity to access a local consulate for assistance (American Society of International Law [2011](#)). We tend to think of international law only in its most noticeable forms, where it governs the high politics of states and important issues like trade, or provides human rights protections or regulates war. However, international law exists all around us.

Whether or not international law is influential, however, is a major debate within international relations. While it is relatively easy to agree on a definition of what international law is, scholars and observers disagree significantly about whether or not international law has influence – or indeed, whether it can be understood to be ‘law’ at all. This is because while we can accept that international law is a body of rules, it differs markedly from domestic law in the way it is made, adjudicated, and most significantly, enforced. Without enforcement, many scholars have argued that it is impossible for law to exist. John Austin ([1954 \[1832\]](#) (see [Box 18.1](#)), following a line of thought that stems from Hobbes’ ([1968 \[1651\]](#)) *Leviathan* (see [Box 18.2](#)), argues that without sovereign coercion, law is not really law at all, because states will not be obliged to follow it (Koh [1997](#): 2609). Other legal scholars, such as H.L.A. Hart ([2012 \[1961\]](#)) have pointed out that coercion is only part of a number of other factors

that may lead to compliance with the law, and therefore that the absence of coercive sanction in the international system does not mean that international law is not law. We will return to these debates later.

**Box 18.1:** Key figures

**John Austin's ([1954](#): 201) views on sanction:**

the duties which international law imposes are enforced by moral sanctions: by fear on the part of nations, or by fear on the part of sovereigns, of provoking general hostility, and incurring its probable evils, in case they shall violate maxims generally received and respected.

**Box 18.2:** Key figures

**Thomas Hobbes ([1968](#): 223–4) on law:**

And Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words and of no strength to secure a man at all. Therefore, notwithstanding the Lawes of Nature ... if there be no Power erected, or not great enough for our security, every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art, for caution against all other men.

## Sources of international law

Where does international law come from? And where do we go if we have an international legal problem? In the domestic context, these questions have simple answers. The legislative branch of government makes the law, and if individuals have a legal dispute, they take it to court through the judicial branch of government. In the international system, however, this question is not so easy to answer.

It is important to have a clear understanding of where we find international law, and what counts as an international law, in order to assist states and other actors in resolving legal disputes or to bring to justice those accused of breaching international criminal law. Accordingly, international lawyers refer to the sources of international law, which are the agreed places where we find international law. These are recorded in Article 38.1 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Article 38.1 establishes four main sources of international law: treaty; customary international law (as evidenced by state practice and *opinio juris*); general principles of law; and judicial decisions. In addition, it provides that eminent legal writings are a subsidiary source. We will now examine each of these in turn.

Treaty is the first source of international law, and refers to treaties and conventions, or legal agreements between states. States can make law via specific multilateral treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions dealing with war crimes. Often, these conventions are created under the auspices of the United Nations: see, for example, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Treaty law is the most recognisable form of law to those familiar with domestic legal systems.

Customary international law is a harder category to understand. Often referred to as 'custom', customary international law can be found when there is evidence that states generally accept a particular practice as binding in law. It includes two elements: state practice (what states actually do) and the fact that

states conduct themselves in a particular manner because they believe that the law requires them to do so. International lawyers use the term *opinio juris* to describe the belief that a practice is a legal obligation. The category of customary international law exists because for many years states followed practices that they understood to be derived from law, even though they were not written down in international conventions. For example, many of the laws of war had existed for a long time before they were codified in treaties like the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, and the Geneva Conventions.

General principles of law refers to legal practices that generally are held in common by most states. These include ideas fundamental to all legal systems, such as the ability to enforce a contract. As international law has become more developed, and more treaties have been signed, dealing with specific issue areas, general principles of law have become less important. Judicial decisions are also a source of international law. Just as lawyers bringing a case in a domestic courtroom will bolster it by referring to previous decisions of that court, international lawyers can draw from a wide range of legal decisions by both international and domestic courts to demonstrate that a particular practice is clearly understood as law. Related to judicial decisions are writings about law by eminent commentators – in other words, arguments that authoritatively clarify what the law is. Writings by eminent commentators are secondary rather than primary sources of international law.

To explain how the sources of international law work, imagine an international lawyer seeking to establish whether or not there was an international law governing a particular practice. The lawyer would begin by assessing whether or not there was customary international law on the question, and do so by establishing whether or not a large group of states followed the same practice (state practice) and whether they considered their actions to be derived from law (*opinio juris*). The lawyer would then find out whether or not

there was a specific convention on the practice or whether or not it was a principle of law generally adhered to in many states. To bolster their case, the lawyer would consult judicial decisions and writings by eminent legal commentators.

In the domestic context, it may seem that the place to which people with legal problems turn is obvious: the courts. But in fact, even inside a state, there are many different types of courts and many different ways to solve legal problems. For example, disputes over traffic tickets are handled in many jurisdictions through specific legal processes managed by designated police officers rather than judges. A married couple deciding to divorce may use a system of arbitration to sort out their affairs rather than the Family Court. In some states, complex commercial disputes are referred to some courts while constitutional matters are referred to others. In other words, different types of judicial process are used to solve legal problems; however, these legal processes all occur in the context of a single judicial system.

While the international system does not have a unitary judicial system, it also has many specific judicial processes for specific legal problems. There are numerous courts and tribunals to which actors can bring their legal problems, or that can be used to enforce the law against states or individuals accused of breaking it. For example, the International Court of Justice deals with cases brought to it by states and issues advisory opinions for the United Nations and its agencies. The tribunals of the [World Trade Organization](#) and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea deal with trade and maritime problems respectively; and the International Criminal Court tries individuals accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

## **Debates about international law**

One of the reasons why it is essential to understand international law while studying international relations is because the debate over whether law matters lies at the heart of key debates in International Relations (IR) theory. IR theories differ sharply over the role and influence of international law.

[Realist](#) theories of international relations (both classical realism and [neo-realism](#)) are deeply sceptical about international law. Both variants of realism view the international realm as fundamentally distinct from the domestic, because of the absence of hierarchy in the international system and accordingly the lack of sanctions for violations of the law. The realist position stems from an implicit assumption that in domestic legal systems law works because it can sanction individuals who violate it. At the international level, the absence of effective sanction means law is not influential.

Neo-realist and realist theories argue that international law is epiphenomenal – in other words, it has no independent influence, but simply reflects the distribution of power in the system (see [Chapter 3](#)). It is not that law is totally unimportant or that it never functions; rather, the argument is that law only works when it coincides with the interests of powerful states. When it conflicts with these interests, states will simply violate the law. Moreover, they will get away with violating the law because it cannot be enforced effectively at the international level. This line of thinking is a direct descendant of the Austinian view of international law outlined above.

Consider the example of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It is generally accepted by international lawyers that the invasion of Iraq violated international law (specifically, the UN Charter, which specifies that force may only be used in self-defence or with the authorisation of the UN Security Council). The United States and the United Kingdom failed to get UN Security Council authorisation before invading Iraq, and thus opened themselves to criticism that the war was illegal. However, there have been no consequences for the United States and the

United Kingdom, or their leaders, for this violation of international law. In the case of Iraq, international law conflicted with the national interests as understood by the leaders of the United States and the United Kingdom, who pursued the latter rather than following the former. Whether or not the invasion of Iraq has fundamentally undermined the law relating to the use of force as expressed in the UN Charter has since been the subject of concern and debate (Brunnée and Toope [2004](#)).

**[Neoliberal](#)** or neoliberal institutionalist perspectives on international law are less pessimistic than those of their realist counterparts (see [Chapter 2](#)). Like realists, neoliberals also argue that law has limited power independent of states, but believe that states will establish legal rules and abide by them even when doing so is not in their short-term interests. They argue that when states act as rational cost–benefit calculators, they can cooperate on certain issue areas for longer-term advantage. (Keohane [1984](#)). Accordingly, for neoliberals it is perfectly logical that states will create laws that assist them in pursuing their interests at the international level, and that they will agree to be bound by these laws even when it is not in their short-term interest to do so. This is because, in the long term, it will benefit the state to have clearer rules of conduct and consequences for breaches of these rules.

For example, states have agreed to an extremely well-developed set of laws that relate to international trade. Many of these laws have been negotiated as part of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (see [Chapter 25](#)). The WTO Tribunal has successfully enforced many legal decisions regarding trade law violations. In some cases, very powerful states have been brought to the Tribunal by weaker states, and been sanctioned (Lawrence [2007](#)). In these instances, states abide by international law and accept the sanction because they are willing to make short-term sacrifices for the long-term benefits associated with the existence of a WTO allied with a clear dispute-settlement mechanism in the form of a tribunal that

can settle disputes. The benefits include increased trade and investment, and reduced tariffs.

The sharpest distinction on the influence of international law is between realists and constructivists. While realists argue that law has no independent power, constructivists assert that law in fact is one of the main drivers of state behaviour. Constructivists believe that states derive their identity from the norms that they follow, and that in turn this determines how a state behaves. International laws are norms that have been codified as law. States can have an identity as 'law-abiding' and therefore be very unlikely to violate any international law. Other states may be entirely disinterested in international law; these have been branded 'rogue' states. Accordingly, one reason that states may abide by international law is that they fear the reputational costs of violating it.

The constructivist understanding of international law sees that the invasion of Iraq does not necessarily challenge the law on the use of force at its core. On this reading, the United States and the United Kingdom, because they have identities as law-abiding states who pursue multilateral solutions, spent considerable and unnecessary time trying to secure UN Security Council authorisation for the invasion. The United States and United Kingdom began to discuss the invasion of Iraq in August 2002, and pushed tirelessly until March 2003 to achieve Security Council authorisation (see [Box 18.3](#)). This delay is especially interesting because it was costly: the optimum time of year to conduct military operations in Iraq is before the onset of hot weather in March, as demonstrated by the 1991 Gulf War (Boot [2003](#)). The delays caused by attempting to gain legal authorisation meant that the invasion did not begin until 20 March, meaning that national interest did not necessarily trump international law. If international law were really meaningless, why did the United States and the United Kingdom pursue legal authorisation to the point where it could have had a significant strategic cost?

### **Box 18.3: Case study**

#### **Justifications for the war in Iraq**

UN Doc S/2003/351

Letter dated 20 March 2003 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

Coalition forces have commenced military operations in Iraq. These operations are necessary in view of Iraq's continued material breaches of its disarmament obligations under relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1441 (2002). The operations are substantial and will secure compliance with those obligations. In carrying out these operations, our forces will take all reasonable precautions to avoid civilian casualties.

The actions being taken are authorised under existing Council resolutions, including its resolutions 678 (1990) and 687 (1991). Resolution 687 (1991) imposed a series of obligations on Iraq, including, most importantly, extensive disarmament obligations, that were conditions of the ceasefire established under it. It has been long recognised and understood that a material breach of these obligations removes the basis of the ceasefire and revives the authority to use force under resolution 678 (1990). This has been the basis for coalition use of force in the past and has been accepted by the Council, as evidenced, for example, by the Secretary-General's public announcement in January 1993 following Iraq's material breach of resolution 687 (1991) that coalition forces had received a mandate from the Council to use force according to resolution 678 (1990).

Iraq continues to be in material breach of its disarmament obligations under resolution 687 (1991), as the Council affirmed in its resolution 1441 (2002). Acting under the authority of Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the Council unanimously decided that Iraq has been and remained in material breach of its obligations and recalled its repeated warnings to Iraq that it will face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations. The resolution then provided Iraq a 'final opportunity' to comply, but stated specifically that violations by Iraq of its obligations under resolution 1441 (2002) to present a currently accurate, full and complete declaration of all aspects of its weapons of mass destruction programmes and to comply with and cooperate fully in the implementation of the resolution would constitute a further material breach.

The Government of Iraq decided not to avail itself of its final opportunity under resolution 1441 (2002) and has clearly committed additional violations. In view of Iraq's material breaches, the basis for the ceasefire has been removed and use of force is authorised under resolution 678 (1990).

Iraq repeatedly has refused, over a protracted period of time, to respond to diplomatic

overtures, economic sanctions and other peaceful means, designed to help bring about Iraqi compliance with its obligations to disarm and to permit full inspection of its weapons of mass destruction and related programmes. The actions that coalition forces are undertaking are an appropriate response. They are necessary steps to defend the United States and the international community from the threat posed by Iraq and to restore international peace and security in the area. Further delay would simply allow Iraq to continue its unlawful and threatening conduct.

It is the Government of Iraq that bears full responsibility for the serious consequences of its defiance of the Council's decisions.

I would be grateful if you could circulate the text of the present letter as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) John D. Negroponte

(PDF of original at <http://www.hamamoto.law.kyoto-u.ac.jp/kogi/2003yakan/s-2003-351.pdf>)

Moreover, for constructivists, violations of international law do not tell us anything in and of themselves. The violation of the law is much less important than how other states decide to react to that violation. After all, domestic law is violated all the time. Despite a law against murder, many murders are committed each year. If a law were genuinely meaningless, no one would care whether or not it was broken. However, if many states and other actors protest the violation of the law, it demonstrates that in fact the influence of law is significant.

In the case of Iraq, the United States and the United Kingdom faced criticism from other states for the invasion, including natural allies such as Canada, which did not support and would not participate in the invasion. Even NATO allies generally perceived to be reliant on the United States, such as Turkey, opposed the invasion strongly. The United States and the United Kingdom hoped to use Turkish territory to open a second front for the invasion, and Turkey refused this request. Opposition even came from inside the United

States and the United Kingdom. In London, a million people marched against the war. The violation of the rule was met with a significant outcry internationally, which demonstrated that the rules on use of force are widely held around the world. Finally, if law really did not matter for the invasion of Iraq, it is hard to understand why the participants caused problems for themselves by incurring delays by expending a great deal of time and effort in making a series of legal arguments in order to justify their position. They put forward a number of arguments that the war was legal, even without UN authorisation, including the idea of 'pre-emptive self-defence' or the notion that it is acceptable to attack someone who might attack you (in this case, the proximate cause was Saddam Hussein's alleged stockpiles of [weapons of mass destruction \(WMD\)](#)) and the violation of UN Security Council resolutions by the Iraqi government. Both of these arguments were made in legal language.

To use another analogy, the United States and the United Kingdom presented a defence of their actions in a way very similar to how lawyers would defend a client against charges of murder. In a murder trial, defence lawyers might seek to argue that the murder was acceptable because it was committed in self-defence, or because the accused had been a victim of severe domestic violence, or because the murderer was insane. It would then be up to the court to decide whether or not the exception existed under the law (we do have exceptions to murder for self-defence), and whether or not the facts supported the argument. While there is no international court that can make these determinations, there is an international court of public opinion, comprising states and individuals around the world. In the case of Iraq, the legal arguments made were rejected by the UN Security Council, and even by allies such as Canada and Turkey. It was determined that the war was illegal despite the arguments of the United States and the United Kingdom to the contrary.

International lawyers have somewhat different theoretical views of international law when compared with IR scholars. International lawyers tend to have a much more nuanced theoretical understanding of what makes law work. In domestic law, we rarely assume that people abide by the law because they fear punishment. For example, most people do not steal. This is not because they are afraid of getting caught, but because they believe stealing to be wrong, or because they understand that social order might collapse if most citizens violated the law. If sanctions do not make individuals comply with the law, what makes states comply?

International lawyers argue that there are many reasons for compliance with the law, and that among these, the fear of sanction is relatively unimportant. In the theft example, the fact that people in general do not steal is explained by their beliefs that stealing is morally wrong and that the law should be obeyed. In other words, they regard many legal rules as special because they have a moral content that provides a strong influence on behaviour. The international lawyer Thomas Franck ([1990](#)) makes a similar argument. He asserts that when a legal system is understood to be legitimate and fair, it will exert a 'compliance pull'; this is because we know that law encourages compliance when it is created through organised procedures, has authority and treats similar cases in the same way.

States might comply with the law because it is in their long-term interests, as in the neoliberal conception above; or because violations might negatively impact their reputation, as in the constructivist account. They might comply because the tendency to use legal systems to solve problems in the domestic sense leads to a similar impulse internationally (Slaughter [1995](#)). If we understand that there are many different reasons to comply with the law, and that most of these reasons also exist for international law, then international law and domestic law do not differ fundamentally.

Furthermore, even the absence of sanction does not tell us much about whether or not law is effective. Powerful states ‘get away with’ violations of the law, as they did in Iraq. But many perpetrators of domestic crimes, even in very robust legal systems, also go unpunished; a glance at the tax law violations of major corporations reveals that powerful organisations often ‘get away’ with crime even inside a state. Instances of violation do not reliably indicate that law does not matter.

To return to the examples of the omnipresence of law at the beginning of the chapter: it is also vitally important to remember that law exists all around, and guides much of human activity. As the international lawyer Louis Henkin ([1979](#): 12) argues, ‘almost all nations observe almost all principles of international law and almost all of their obligations almost all of the time’. In IR, and in the contemporary world, we tend to focus on the big, exciting areas of international law, such as the rules that govern war or protect against the worst of human behaviour by controlling crimes against humanity. We ignore the multiple ways in which law shapes the day-to-day interaction of states. We fail to examine mundane obedience to the law because we focus on all the occasions when law does not work, rather than considering the ways in which it does.

## **Contemporary examples of international law**

The chapter now turns to examine two current examples where international law has played an essential role. While it is true that it is important to recognise that international law is broad, and deals with many mundane issues, it is also true that international law is at the heart of many disputes in international politics today. It is important to understand the legal skeleton that undergirds these disputes. In fact, law itself can be the cause of serious international problems.

This is especially true in two contemporary areas: the operation and membership of the International Criminal Court (ICC); and the maritime disputes over islands in the South China Sea.

### **The International Criminal Court**

The ICC was established in 1988 by the Rome Statute. It is responsible for prosecuting individuals for international crimes, which include genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, but only in two situations: when the UN Security Council or individual states have referred investigations to it; and in situations where national courts have demonstrated that they are unwilling or unable to do so themselves. As of late 2016, there are 124 states that are party to the Rome Statute.

War crimes and crimes against humanity are clearly articulated legal concepts with considerable history (see [Chapter 17](#)). After World War II, states created ad hoc tribunals to deal with war crimes and crimes against humanity: the Nuremberg and Tokyo Tribunals dealing respectively with Germany and Japan. Such tribunals were not used again until extensive crimes against humanity and genocide were revealed in Rwanda and Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Two special tribunals were established to deal with these crimes: the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The success of these tribunals prompted calls for the creation of a permanent international criminal court.

The United States had concerns about the creation of the ICC from the beginning. Some of these concerns were met with corresponding changes in the Rome Statute, but others were not. The United States was particularly concerned that the burden of superpower status required it to intervene internationally in wars abroad, and meant that US military personnel were disproportionately

vulnerable to prosecution. In addition, it disagreed over the question of whether or not the ICC could initiate a prosecution in the event that a state failed to prosecute one of its citizens for their actions while members of the armed forces. Essentially, the United States wished to retain a veto over the potential prosecution of its citizens (Seguin [2000](#)). These concerns could not be met in a manner that satisfied the US Congress, which must ratify all treaties signed by the United States, and so the United States remains outside the International Criminal Court. The absence of the world's leading military power would seem to support the conjecture that international legal mechanisms are meaningless, as powerful states will do as they please.

The ICC's subsequent evolution has also been troubled. African states have argued that they have disproportionately been targeted by the prosecutors of the court. Before 2016, all nine open ICC investigations were in Africa. Supporters of the court point out that, while this is true, the focus on Africa is not deliberate but rather reflects the fact that African states are well represented as parties of the Rome Statute (so there are more African states than states in other regions); that one of the criteria for prosecutions is that the court will step in only when national prosecutions are not in train; and that this situation affects Africa more than it does other regions. Nonetheless, the impact of the court's focus on Africa has been negative, and it is partly for this reason that, in November 2016, South Africa announced its plans to withdraw from the ICC.

So is the ICC a failure? Do its challenges represent the powerlessness of international law? There is an alternative reading of its challenges. As the international lawyer David Luban ([2013](#)) notes, we must not forget that there had been *no* prosecutions for war crimes between the World War II tribunals and the 1990s, and the notion that heads of state could be held accountable for crimes against humanity and war crimes was unthinkable in this period. The ICC

has helped to herald an era where impunity is less possible, even if punishment is imperfectly achieved.

### **The South China Sea**

The South China Sea has long been recognised as a potential zone for international crisis. The nature of the relationship between land and sea in this area means that there are many narrow shipping lanes. These are referred to as chokepoints, where it would be easy for one state to block the transit of another's vessels. Therefore, the ability to control chokepoints is a major strategic advantage for states. China faces particular difficulties, because for a Chinese vessel to sail between China and the Horn of Africa requires passing multiple chokepoints through the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca.

However, a clear understanding of the South China Sea dispute rests on an effective knowledge of the international law that shapes how states use the world's oceans. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was only ratified in 1982, but codified a wide range of existing practice and customary international law. UNCLOS is in many ways a good example of the type of international law that is less perceptible because it works in the background to establish the procedures by which states conduct their business and relate to each other at sea.

UNCLOS established rules that divided the world's oceans into different zones, each of which have different rules. Starting from the closest point to shore, these categories are territorial waters, exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the high seas. Territorial waters are the coastal waters of a state, extending out 12 nautical miles. Within territorial waters, the state is sovereign and its own laws and policing apply. The EEZ extends from the coast out 200 nautical miles, but only includes rights to the waters below the surface of the sea. The ocean on

top of the EEZ outside the state's territorial waters is classified as the high seas, and is beyond the jurisdiction of the coastal state. States are able to extract resources from their own EEZ, such as seabed oil and gas, fish or electricity derived from wind or waves. The high seas, or international waters, are all other areas of the ocean. On the high seas, no one state has sovereignty. All states are able to navigate the high seas freely, both in the ocean and in the air above, fish, use the high seas for cables and pipelines, and conduct research.

It is impossible to understand the dispute in the South China Seas without understanding this legal background. First, the South China Sea is a 'zone-locked' part of the world's oceans: it is impossible to reach the high seas without transiting another state's EEZ or territorial waters (Kraska [2016](#)). This makes it harder for a state like China to navigate these waters. Second, many of these EEZs overlap, creating the possibility of disputes between states over valuable marine resources. The combination of the geography of the South China Sea and provisions of UNCLOS make this a region that is an obvious source of potential international tension: in 1974, China and South Vietnam fought a battle over the South Paracels, a land feature in the South China Sea.

Events in 2015 and 2016 demonstrated that the conflict created by international law and state interest in the South China Sea was no longer just a potential issue. China has long asserted that it has historical sovereignty over much of the South China Sea. The area claimed by China is often referred to as the Nine-Dash Line (see [Figure 18.1](#)), reflecting the way it is depicted in maps. In order to bolster these claims, China has attempted to build up maritime features. Maritime features are different geographical formations that are not obviously land, such as rocks and land only visible at low tide (known as low-tide elevations). China has used engineering techniques such as dredging to develop rocks and low-tide elevations into 'islands'. This is useful because islands generate territorial waters and an EEZ, whereas rocks unfit for human

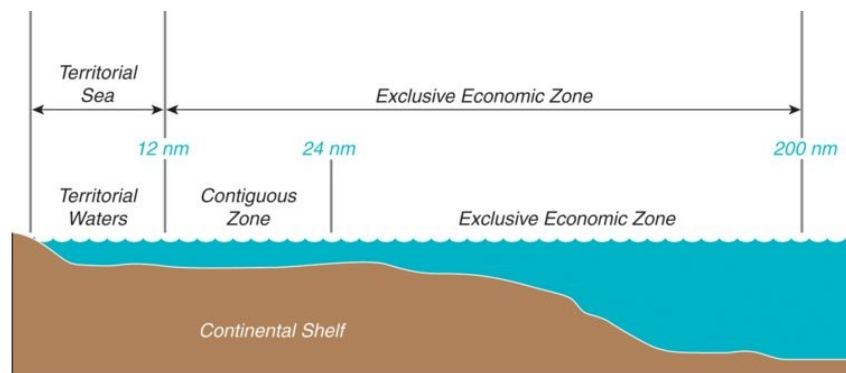
habitation only create a territorial sea, and low-tide elevations give states no rights to the ocean whatsoever. If China's efforts to build islands were to be legally recognised as 'islands', it would allow China to have better navigation through the South China Sea, allow it to control the navigation of other states, and give it potentially lucrative access to natural resources. China is manipulating the international legal system in order to give it a potential advantage; without the rules about EEZs and low-tide elevations, however, its strategy would not be possible.



**Figure 18.1** The Nine-Dash Line

Other states in the region have become concerned about the environmental and future strategic impact of the island-building campaign. The Philippines took China to the UNCLOS Arbitral Tribunal in 2013, and asked the Tribunal to rule on a number of questions, including the validity of China's claims under the Nine-Dash Line, the nature of the maritime features claimed by China and the legality of their development. Appearing in the Tribunal is not mandatory, and

China chose not to participate, although it did release a position paper justifying its legal views on the question. In July 2016, the Tribunal ruled comprehensively against China, most notably rejecting the sovereignty claims of the Nine-Dash Line, asserting that Chinese fishing in Philippine territorial waters was illegal, confirming that the maritime features in question were maritime features and not islands, and that they generated no territorial waters despite the construction activities attempting to transform them.



**Figure 18.2** UNCLOS zones  
(nm = nautical miles)

The question for international law now is whether or not China abides by this ruling, and what the implications will be if it does not. Tension in the region is higher than it has been for a long time, with the United States and its allies asserting rights to freedom of navigation by conducting military exercises while China angrily denounces the Tribunal decision. UNCLOS has worked very well since its ratification almost forty years ago, and has served state interests well by clarifying the rules for navigation, trade and natural resource extraction. If China challenges or ignores the decision, will this system of rules be undermined?

The situation in the South China Sea simultaneously demonstrates the enormous power of international law and its potential failings. Without the rules establishing how the world's oceans can be used, there might be no dispute in

the South China Sea at all. Disputes over resources or navigation in the area might simply be settled by force. The rules set out in UNCLOS are strong, and they set out essential procedures for state activity. They have been crucial to the conduct of commerce and navigation. It will be interesting to see whether or not China will challenge this over-arching structure of the rules or find a middle way that helps to preserve the benefits of the UNCLOS system.

## **Conclusion**

International law is not just a collection of dry legal texts that only cover the issues states deem to be unimportant. In fact, international law shapes almost every form of international interaction, from the high political issues of trade and war to the simple regulation of travel. The debates in International Relations theory about the influence of law are likewise not merely theoretical debates. Whether or not law influences states is a crucially important question, and we can see this question play out in many different ways. From the decision to invade Iraq, to the role and function of the ICC, to current maritime security challenges in the South China Sea, law is everywhere in international disputes. States devote considerable resources and time to sorting out the legality of their actions. Accordingly, it is of essential importance for all scholars of international relations, even when they are sceptical of law's influence, to understand what international law is and how it works.

## **Discussion questions**

**18.1** Why do you think people follow the law? Do you think the reasons are the same or different for states?

**18.2** What role do you think law played in the run-up to the 2003 war in Iraq? Do you think we can understand this conflict without understanding the international rules in question?

**18.3** What does the South China Sea dispute tell us about the strength of international law? Debate whether or not the dispute is strengthening or weakening international law.

**18.4** Can you think of another international crisis in which law has played a central role?

### *Further reading*

Armstrong, David, Farrell, Theo and Lambert, Helene 2007, *International law and international relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *A very clearly written text designed for those with an interest in both subjects.*

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Brunnée, Jutta and Toope, Stephen J. 2010, *Legitimacy and legality in international law: An interactional account*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An interesting account of why states follow international law; combines insights from international law jurisprudence with constructivism.*

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Burley, Anne-Marie Slaughter 1993, 'International law and international relations theory: A dual agenda', *The American Journal of International Law* 87(2): 205–39. *One of the first statements of the relationship between international relations and international law, and still one of the clearest.*

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Crawford, James 2012, *Brownlie's principles of public international law*, 8th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press. *The definitive textbook designed for international law students and practitioners with comprehensive coverage of all aspects of international law.*

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Dunoff, Jeffrey L. and Pollack, Mark A. 2013, *Interdisciplinary perspectives on international law and international relations: The state of the art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An edited collection that delves into every aspect of interest to scholars of both subjects, from issue areas to the significance of compliance and violation.*

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Reus-Smit, Christian (ed.) 2004, *The Politics of International Law*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Provides a good introduction to constructivist accounts of international law, with individual contributions covering a wide range of topics.*

# The globalisation of international society



**Shogo Suzuki**

[Introduction](#)

[International society and its expansion: Insights from the English School of International Relations](#)

[Mary Graham and Morgan Brigg: Indigeneity and IR](#)

[The expansion of international society](#)

[The English School's rosy vision of the expansion of international society](#)

[The expansion of international society: An unfinished project?](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Discussion questions](#)

[Further reading](#)

## Introduction

This chapter explains the way international society emerged and was globalised. Its main purpose is to explore how the European sovereign state system

expanded across the globe to become the truly international order of sovereign states (often called the states-system) that we see today. The first part of the chapter examines how the expansion of the states-system came about and how it has been analysed. The second part provides a critical discussion of the way in which the spread of the states-system has been understood in IR, with the aim of provoking your thinking about the enduring [Eurocentrism](#) that continues to bedevil our theorising of international politics.

International relations is often presented as a world of sovereign states, with each claiming exclusive jurisdiction within clearly demarcated territorial borders. From our vantage point in the early twenty-first century, this may seem like an enduring or even permanent and natural feature of international relations. But nothing could be further from the truth.

While the international order of sovereign states has indeed spread throughout the world, this is a distinctly modern phenomenon that only happened in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Prior to this, many areas of the globe organised their polities in different ways, and often had their own distinctive international/regional orders that were very different from those of Europe, where the sovereign states-system originated. Diplomatic relations between the European and the non-European worlds were not based on the exchange of ambassadors or equality among states, as they are today (Suzuki [2009](#); Zhang [2001](#)). In fact, many of the non-European polities were often much more powerful than the European powers, and this meant that the Europeans had to follow the former's rules and norms if they were to trade or enter into some form of diplomatic relations (Suzuki, Zhang and Quirk [2014](#)).

The spread of the sovereign states system that we see today happened primarily as a result of the imperialist expansion of the West (Europe and the United States). The nineteenth century brought about the Industrial Revolution

and a significant increase in the military power of the West. It also brought about the notion that the West and its 'civilisation' (such as political institutions, legal concepts, and other norms) represented the pinnacle of human achievement, and that it was the Western 'civilised' states' (and people's) responsibility to introduce the blessings of Western civilisation to the non-European world. Of course, most non-European polities were neither asked about nor given any choice concerning this. As we will see, the only way for non-European polities to ward off the imperialist drives of the Western powers was to adopt the European 'standard of civilisation', or risk being placed under the political tutelage of the Western powers until they were deemed to be politically 'mature' enough for independence. This dynamic only ended after World War II, when colonialism became increasingly difficult to justify. But even then, the newly independent African and Asian states had to become 'sovereign states', thus cementing the global expansion of the European international order.

So why should we study this *fait accompli*? If the rest of the world has adopted the European standards of statehood and ways of conducting diplomacy, so what? There are a number of reasons why this topic is important. First, we need to be aware of the fact that the global expansion of the European international order took place through coercion. As noted above, non-European polities could only attain their independence by becoming 'sovereign states', invoking the European concepts of sovereignty, nationalism and self-determination. Put differently, the only way to become a 'legitimate player' in a 'game' called modern international politics was by accepting the rules that were written by and for European/Western states. Non-European states have thus had to begin their participation in the modern international order from a position of weakness. Although we hear much talk of the 'rise of the non-West' (such as China, India and Brazil), the fundamental 'rules of the game' in the sovereign state system arguably continue to be dominated by the West, and its residual

power is still felt. There remains a strong sense of resentment towards the West in the non-Western world, and a lot of this stems from the forcible way in which the non-European polities were dragged into the states-system against their will, and treated as ‘immature’ children incapable of deciding how to govern their own states. This dynamic, which we commonly associate with colonialism, still exists today. In order to understand this properly, an historical perspective is needed.

Second, this particular process is important because it helps us overcome **Eurocentrism** (see [Box 19.1](#)) in our analysis. Eurocentrism can be understood as a worldview that places Europe, its people, ideas and civilisation at the centre of history and international relations. It is a perspective that sees the West as the generator of all ideas and concepts linked to modernity (Hobson [2012](#): 6). In the social sciences, it is also used to denote a tendency to use European perspectives to analyse social phenomena. As we will see, IR has been notoriously Eurocentric in its observations of the global spread of the European international order, where non-European polities are reduced to passive agents that are only too happy to adopt the blessings of European diplomatic customs and norms. This chapter seeks to challenge this perspective, and provide an alternative account of the expansion of international society that takes greater account of non-European experiences.

### **Box 19.1: Terminology**

#### **Eurocentrism and International Relations theory**

Eurocentrism in IR theory manifests itself in many areas. Its theorising relies heavily on the history of Europe, with the non-Western world only really ‘mattering’ after World War II, when decolonisation took place. Relations between the West and the non-West are frequently depicted

from a position of Western strength: international relations between the West and non-West when the non-West was dominant are all but forgotten, and the West is seen as a dynamic creator of ‘international’ norms, while the non-West frequently is reduced to a passive recipient of ‘norms’.



**Figure 19.1** Eurocentrism has long dominated studies of international relations.

## **International society and its expansion: Insights from the English School of International Relations**

There are surprisingly few theoretical insights into the expansion of international society in mainstream International Relations (IR). [Realism](#) takes the sovereign state, as well as the states-system, as an ahistorical ‘given’, demonstrating little interest in or understanding of how the present international system emerged

historically. It explains neither why sovereign states actually did not exist in the non-European world prior to the nineteenth century, nor how they came to be included in the global system of states.

The English school is one of the few exceptions to the notion that IR theory rarely examines the expansion of international society (see [Box 19.2](#)). The English School's key theoretical contribution to IR is the concept of [international society](#). The English School emerged in the context of the Cold War, when realism was in its heyday in the discipline of IR. Scholars associated with the English School were (to differing degrees) committed to exploring and demonstrating the possibilities for avoiding the brutal, Darwinistic world as depicted by realists, where the survival of states was constantly under threat and only the most powerful could survive. This normative commitment stemmed from their fundamental belief that humankind was capable of escaping the state of nature and establishing some shared norms and rules among themselves—in other words, constructing a *social* life in order to coexist with one another.

### **Box 19.2** Discussion points

#### **The English School**

The English School has grown in popularity over the past twenty-five years as a school of IR. Though some scholars see the English School as an offshoot of [realism](#), its proponents believe it offers a middle way between and beyond realism and liberal [idealism](#).

Ironically, the English School came into existence in the process of a polemical attack on IR scholars closely associated with the London School of Economics. Roy Jones ([1981](#)) launched a withering assault on Hedley Bull, Michael Donelan, Alan James, C.A.W. Manning, Fred Northedge and Martin Wight, who he thought formed a more or less

coherent school. He called for the school's closure, arguing that its defence of the 'classical approach' to IR was [idealist](#), unempirical and ignorant of scientific procedure.

Tim Dunne's ([1998](#)) pioneering history of the English School made the case for viewing it as an outgrowth of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, a group of IR scholars that began meeting at the University of Cambridge from the late 1950s onwards. Its members included its leading figure, the historian Herbert Butterfield, as well as Wight, Bull, Michael Howard and Adam Watson, among others. Dunne ([1998](#): 6–11) argues that these scholars shared a particular tradition of inquiry, an interpretive approach to the subject, and an acknowledgement of the subject's inherently [normative](#) content. Interestingly, and controversially, Dunne also includes E.H. Carr as a member of the English School.

Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami ([2006](#)) have presented an impressive reassessment and reconstruction of the English School. They question the inclusion of Carr in the school, and argue instead for the inclusion of Manning, who heavily influenced the thought of Hedley Bull, the Australian who has arguably been the most significant theorist to emerge from the school. Whatever their differences regarding who is in and who is out of the English School, for Dunne – as for Linklater and Suganami – the school's key contribution to the study of IR lies in the notion of international society. The English School argues that states exist in an international society, based on common rules, institutions and [norms](#). This establishes and maintains order among states and supports the proposition that, while states exist in a formal [anarchy](#), they nonetheless make up a society of states. In this respect, the English School continues a line of thought that extends from Hugo Grotius in the

seventeenth century (Bull, Kingsbury and Roberts [1990](#)), which is why it is sometimes known as a [Grotian](#) approach.

On the basis of this belief, Hedley Bull ([1995](#): 4), one of the key scholars of the English School approach, proposed that all societies share a number of fundamental universal goals. These are (1) ‘to ensure that life will be in some measure secure against violence resulting in death or bodily harm’; (2) ‘to ensure that promises, once made, will be kept, or that agreements, once undertaken, will be carried out’; and (3) ‘ensuring that the possession of things will remain stable to some degree, and will not be subject to challenges that are constant and without limit’. In the international context, these goals resulted in the emergence of an [international society](#), as opposed to an [international system](#) (see [Box 19.3](#)).

### **Box 19.3:** Discussion points

#### **Hedley Bull on system and society**

*A system of states* (or [international system](#)) is formed when two or more states have sufficient contact between them, and have sufficient impact on one another’s decisions, to cause them to behave – at least in some measure – as parts of a whole.

(Bull [1977](#): 9)

*A society of states* (or international society) exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and

common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.

(Bull [1977](#): 13)

The implication here is that in an international system there is limited interaction between states to the extent that common norms or rules have yet to emerge. In practice, it is extremely difficult to ascertain when interactions in an international system become sufficiently dense enough for the emergence of common rules, norms and institutions to become an international society – after all, even under conditions of limited interaction and different culture, humankind has always been able to establish some form of rudimentary social relations.

Bull ([1995](#): 16) states that international society's goals are (1) the 'preservation of the system and society of states itself', which means protecting the privileged positions sovereign states enjoy in the international system today; (2) the maintenance of 'the independence or external sovereignty of individual states'; (3) 'the maintenance of peace in the sense of the absence of war among member states of international society as the normal condition of their relationship, to be breached only in special circumstances and according to principles that are generally accepted' (Bull [1995](#): 17); and (4) the 'limitation of violence', which is made possible by states' acceptance of shared norms, and adherence to international agreements (also known as the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*). The 'goal of stability of possession is reflected in international society not only by the recognition by states of one another's property, but more

fundamentally in the compact of mutual recognition of sovereignty, in which states accept one another's spheres of jurisdiction' (Bull [1995](#): 18–19).

**Box 19.4:** Discussion points

**Hedley Bull on the five institutions of international society**

To help achieve international order, international society has developed five [institutions](#):

- 1 international law
- 2 the diplomatic system
- 3 the [balance of power](#)
- 4 war, and
- 5 the [great powers](#).

It is important to note that the 'balance of power' is not something that inadvertently emerges as a reaction to the patterns of the distribution of power, as realists argue, but rather something that is purposefully maintained by the members of international society to prevent the emergence of an overbearing power that would threaten the sovereignty of members. The great powers are not merely states with the preponderance of power; they are also tasked with special political privileges in international society in exchange for playing a managerial role in maintaining international order. One example of this institution in operation today is the system of the Permanent Five (P5) members of the [UN](#) Security Council, where the P5 members are given the privilege of a veto.

It is worth keeping in mind that the scholars of the English School were by no means idealists who believed that the existence of societal relations among states meant the total absence of war, or the end to power politics. As the title of Bull's ([1977](#)) classic work, *The Anarchical Society*, implies, English School scholars did – like the realists – accept that the international system was anarchical, and that there was no over-arching authority to enforce order among sovereign states. Despite their rejection of the realist vision of a Hobbesian world order where life could be ‘nasty, brutish and short’, this did not mean that states would never be invaded, or a great power would abstain from abusing its power and ignoring international norms whenever it suited its interests. To English School scholars, the order brought about by the society of states was a highly fragile one and, in the context of the Cold War, could only function to maintain a rudimentary and fragile degree of order among states with a variety of different political systems and cultures (see [Box 19.5](#)). Nevertheless, their vision of international order was a cautiously optimistic one that both demonstrated the possibilities of morality and progress within international politics (Reus-Smit [2002](#)).

#### **Box 19.5: Terminology**

##### **Solidarism and pluralism**

Pluralism is a political position that accepts that there is a variety of cultures and modes of governance among sovereign states, and international society can only realistically facilitate a minimum degree of coexistence and order among culturally and politically diverse sovereign states. Solidarism, on the other hand, argues that international society should extend its protection beyond states to human beings. If a state fails in its duty – be it through civil war or illiberal governance – the

international community has the moral obligation to intervene (humanitarian intervention). Solidarists also take the position that international society should play a role in promoting a particular type of governance (in practice, democratic governance today) for the sake of promoting human rights.

## **Indigeneity and IR**

### **Mary Graham and Morgan Brigg**

Indigenous first nations practised key international political functions long before the emergence of European conceptions of politics that underpin most IR scholarship. Indigenous civilisation on the present-day Australian continent, from where we write, is 60 000 years old on conservative estimates, meaning that Aboriginal peoples carried on a political existence for tens of thousands of years before Sumerian, Egyptian and Greek civilisations that are typically taken as starting points for reflecting upon politics. For the most part of this long history, numerous distinct Australian Aboriginal groups or nations (there were approximately 500 at the time of British colonisation) lived in relative isolation from the wider world, a situation which generates the conditions for a long-term natural experiment in human order-making.

Much European political thought has cast Indigenous peoples as savage, brutish and disordered. This pattern, which persists and reverberates, facilitated colonial dispossession (which continues in settler-colonies) and provided reference points for positioning European peoples as active agents at the apogee of political order-making.

Indigenous peoples were – and are – commonly imagined as either barbaric or romantic, or to be ‘naturally’ succeeded as part of modernisation and progress. One of the effects of these ways of thinking is that Indigenous conceptions of order and relations among nations have been bypassed and disavowed. If it is possible to move beyond this disavowal – a process that some refer to as decentring or decolonising European-derived knowledge disciplines such as IR – then engaging with Indigenous peoples offers ways to reflect and expand upon IR’s conceptions of political order and relations among nations.

Indigenous activities in trade, diplomacy and regulation of other international social and political activities are ‘international’, though not in ways that are readily amenable to current IR scholarship. Consider, for instance, the possible relevance of the IR concept of anarchy. At the time of European arrival in Australia, there were numerous interacting yet autonomous Aboriginal groups across the continent, with no overarching political authority. From what we know, these groups practised inter-group trade, conflict-management and diplomacy. Autonomy, both of individuals and groups, was important, so the idea of anarchy appears to resonate. However, key IR precepts accompanying the notion of anarchy are absent. Security dilemmas, wars of conquest and *realpolitik* do not seem to feature. Territory is important, but not in a strictly bounded sense.

Instead, Aboriginal Australian political order operates in very different ways. ‘Autonomy’ is certainly important, but it is bound with the importance of place and the pursuit of balance through relationality. Place is not simply a location: Aboriginal cosmology holds that people come into being through places in a landscape that is alive and sentient. This agential landscape holds both the trace and continued presence of

Ancestor Beings, and thus the Dreaming, which is a poetic code for supporting an ordered and ethical existence. The Dreaming brings people into existence and provides guidance, in the form of stories, songs and ceremonies that are open to interpretation, for conducting oneself and relations among people.

Because places are related to each other and to people, peoples are also related, and hence are not isolates positioned against each other and the world. Instead, they are bound more or less closely or tenuously. Autonomy is valued, but balance is pursued – both among human and other than human forces of the Dreaming – through relationships that are required by the operation of complex kinship systems. Relations among nations are pursued through these same principles. Other nations are naturally strange, other and different because they are of other places. But this does not preclude relations with them because one's Dreaming connects through place(s) with their Dreaming and this facilitates interaction and exchange. This does not eliminate fear and conflict among Aboriginal Australian groups or within groups, but it may explain the relative absence of 'survivalist' thinking in the form of the IR security dilemma.

The pursuit of balance does not make Australian Aboriginal peoples inherently peaceful. Managing relations among autonomous individuals and groups can be tense, frustrating, agonistic and hostile. Nor does the pursuit of balance lead to the artifice of equality. Nonetheless, the embedding of peoples with each other and place through relationality seems to serve as a check on the accretion of centralised political authority, and require ongoing negotiation in the production and sustaining of political order and overall existence. This negotiation occurs through a subtle and highly innovative system for relating people

and peoples to each other through landscape. The challenge of how to achieve this possibility has, conversely, only recently begun to be grappled with in IR in response to climate change and the advent of the Anthropocene.

Indigenous peoples and their political systems have been damaged badly through colonisation, sometimes to the brink of extinction through genocidal violence. Indigenous ideas have been disavowed, and systems disallowed and otherwise destroyed. The grossly asymmetric conditions of Indigenous political existence have meant that Indigenous peoples have often had no choice other than to trade in the ideas of the colonisers. Indigenous ideas have been put to one side or mixed with those of the colonisers, including through Indigenous appeals for justice that have been made to and through dominant European-derived frameworks and ideas.

However, recent decades have seen a burgeoning revitalisation of Indigenous cultures and knowledges. Indigenous political ideas may necessarily have been downplayed to secure meagre rights and political progress, but they have not been forgotten. One result is that Indigenous peoples now debate how much has been given up in engaging with dominant political orders – including through the negotiation of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, for instance – and what needs to be done to recuperate Indigenous political orders on Indigenous terms. As Indigenous peoples connect with other traditions around the world, it seems that ideas of relationality, in particular, resonate more widely, including in Confucianism, Daoism, Sufism and many other knowledge, spiritual and religious traditions of the world.

Indigenous peoples are remarkably diverse, so our hope is merely to evoke, from an Australian perspective, some ways of thinking about

Indigeneity and IR. Nonetheless, Indigenous peoples around the globe tend to share a strong orientation to place and relationality through which they have practised the skills of simultaneously being human and producing political order, often over long periods of time. We hope you agree that engaging with these approaches to political order and relations among nations provides a striking reference point for globalising IR.

## **The expansion of international society**

The English School's theoretical concept of international society can, as noted above, trace its origins to the history of European international politics. While it has expanded to encompass the globe today, this did not really happen until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Conventional theories of IR, however, treat the sovereign state system as a 'given' – something that has simply just 'existed' in the international system. As such, they fall into the trap of Eurocentrism, seeing the sovereign state system as the 'only game in town' in international politics, and effectively treating the historical and political experiences of the non-European world as irrelevant to our theorising of the social world.

It is historically incorrect, however, to assume that the sovereign system has been the only way of organising interstate politics, and that the Europeans have always been able to interact with the non-Western world on their own terms. Prior to the expansion of international society, the European international order was simply one international order amongst others, and is more aptly described as a European international society. Prior to its expansion, there existed multiple regional international societies throughout the world, each with its own diverse set of rules that governed relations between polities (Suzuki, Zhang and Quirk

[2014](#)) In East Asia, for instance, the Chinese empire established an international order (often known as the tribute system) that was based on hierarchical relations between states, rather than the sovereign equality that was the hallmark of European international society. The Chinese empire was not only the regional hegemon, but also the economic powerhouse of the global economy prior to the industrial revolution. This position of power meant that the Europeans wishing to enter into diplomatic relations with China had no choice but to interact with China on the basis of Chinese rules. Crucially, however, by accepting these local/regional rules, the Europeans successfully established flourishing trade relations with many non-European polities, and this is testament to the fact that civilisational differences are not necessarily barriers to international cooperation, as some authors (Huntington [2002](#); O'Hagan [1995](#)) have argued controversially.

This status quo of the coexistence of multiple international societies began to change in the nineteenth century. The Industrial Revolution took off in Europe, resulting in an aggressive quest to secure raw materials and markets for European products, or to take over areas that were deemed to be of strategic interest. These conquests were backed up by the newly developed military technology the Industrial Revolution had helped produce. This rush for colonial possessions would, at times, trigger rivalries among the European powers, resulting in even more colonial expansion.

In addition to this economic dimension of the expansion of European international society, the Industrial Revolution resulted in the rise of the notion that Europe and its civilisation – which included political institutions, customs and technology – represented the highest level of civilisational attainment, and that the Europeans (and later the Americans, who annexed Hawai'i and colonised the Philippines) had a unique mission to spread the trappings of European civilisation to the rest of humankind (Adas [1990](#)). This ideology (known as the 'civilising mission'), that emerged in the late nineteenth century

was a profoundly racist one: non-European peoples and their polities were classified into ‘semi-civilised’ or ‘savage’ entities. Until these peoples had attained a certain level of ‘civilisation’, they were deemed unfit to govern themselves. They would therefore be placed under European tutelage until they were deemed to be politically ‘mature’ enough for self-rule. If outright colonisation was not imposed, ‘uncivilised’ polities were often subjected to unequal treaties, where the Western powers refused to recognise the ‘uncivilised’ state’s right to try foreigners under their own laws, as well as the right to set their own tariff rates.

The only way for non-European polities to escape the yoke of European (and American) imperialism, and establish independence and autonomy, was to obtain international (in practice, Western) recognition that a state had become sufficiently ‘mature’. This ‘political maturity’ was measured using what was then called the ‘standard of civilisation’ (see [Box 19.6](#)). This ‘standard of civilisation’ functioned as something of a checklist: once the ‘uncivilised’ polities were deemed to have fulfilled this ‘standard’, the Western powers would ‘grant’ the non-Western polities political independence.

#### **Box 19.6: Terminology**

##### **The ‘standard of civilisation’**

The ‘standard of civilisation’ stipulated that states had to (1) guarantee ‘basic rights, i.e. life, dignity, and property; freedom of travel, commerce, and religion, especially that of foreign nationals’ (Gong [1984](#): 14); (2) have effective domestic political institutions (which, in reality, had to be modelled on ‘superior’ European ones); (3) ‘accept international law, including the laws of war’ and have ‘a domestic system of courts, codes, and published laws which guarantee legal justice

for all within its jurisdiction, foreigners and native citizens alike’ (Gong [1984](#): 15); (4) establish ‘adequate and permanent avenues for diplomatic interchange and communication’ (Gong [1984](#): 15); and – somewhat subjectively; (5) conform ‘to the accepted norms and practices of the “civilized” international society, e.g. suttee, polygamy, and slavery’ (Gong [1984](#): 15).

The (still) European international society was therefore arguably a dualistic, ‘Janus-faced’ entity (Keene [2002](#); Suzuki [2009](#)) during this time. On the one hand, for the ‘civilised’ states – in reality, white, European states – international society functioned to ensure a certain degree of coexistence. Imperial rivalries and power politics were rife in Europe as well, but institutions such as international law or the balance of power provided a certain degree – however minimal – of protection from outright annexation by other powers. On the other hand, towards those polities deemed ‘uncivilised’, the institutions of international society became tools to be used to justify outright colonisation by the European powers in the name of ‘civilisation’. War became an institution to pacify any rebellion against the Europeans, and the institution of great power management merely functioned to manage European rivalries in non-European lands. International law similarly failed to protect the sovereignty of non-European polities.

Previously, the philosophy of natural law (see [Box 19.7](#)) was invoked to argue that international law accorded all peoples protection under the assumption that human beings were components of states. In the sixteenth century, Francisco Vitoria had famously argued that the native polities of South America should be ‘regarded as nations with their own legitimate interests’ that required respect

(Shaw [2008](#): 22). By the nineteenth century, however, natural law had declined as a legal doctrine. The new legal doctrine of positivism emphasised actual practices and procedures that had been concluded between the concerned parties. This meant that non-European polities, who were not members of European international society, ceased to become referents of international law. The racist climate of the nineteenth century also contributed to the dehumanisation of non-European peoples and their political rights (Keal [1995](#); [2003](#)), furthering the notion that the non-European peoples were beyond the pale of the protection of international law. This left the latter ripe for European colonial conquest.

#### **Box 19.7: Terminology**

##### **Natural law and positive law**

Natural law is a legal doctrine that law is based on divine will or discovered through the application of reason. Positive law, in contrast, is a doctrine that sees law as established through practice, such as established procedures and consent of actors to be bound by certain rules.

## **The English School's rosy vision of the expansion of international society**

Strangely, the dualisms within international society have not been acknowledged sufficiently by the founding scholars of the English School. Indeed, the imperialist dimension of the expansion of European international society curiously seems to drop out of conventional accounts, with some authors going

as far to say that, 'Wherever possible, the European countries sought to bring traditional, non-European countries into international society in as orderly and humane a matter as possible' (Gong [1984](#): 6). The entry of non-European states into European international society is depicted as a success story of progress where states like Japan, China or Turkey gradually adopted international law, the European diplomatic system, 'modernised' their domestic political institutions, and participated in international conferences. Following their programs of 'modernisation' and the fulfilling of the 'standard of civilisation', these states were permitted to become full members of international society.

The English School's relative silence on the issue of imperialism can be traced back to its normative commitment to exploring the possibilities of escaping the brutal world of power politics in the international system. For the English School scholars, the concept of international society was both *ethically desirable* and an empirical reality. It was something that would bring a degree of order and stability into an anarchical world. Therefore, one of the key questions and goals the English School wanted to address was why European international society came to expand and encompass the globe despite the fact that international society could trace its origins to Europe, and was originally rooted in Christian civilisation. The empirical 'fact' that these rules and norms were accepted in spite of cultural differences led the English School scholars to conclude that these rules, and the values that underpinned them, were *universal*. Such beliefs were only strengthened by the implicit [Eurocentrism](#) of Bull and Watson ([1984](#)), who were ultimately unable to escape their belief that Western values were both universal and that their adoption by the rest of the world represented 'progress' (O'Hagan [2002](#); Wight [1966](#): 128). This led them to emphasise the progressive aspects of the non-European polities' adoption of certain institutions of international society, such as international law and the abolition of slavery (which was also part of the 'standard of civilisation'), but

remain silent, for example, on international society's failure to recognise Indigenous peoples and polities (see the Graham and Brigg postcard in this chapter).

Consequently, the English School's accounts of the expansion of international society have generally failed to account fully for the violence and racism that accompanied the expansion of international society. While it is true that many non-European peoples were genuinely impressed with the military technology and certain aspects of Western civilisation, their subsequent attempts at political reform came about because they had no other choice but to do so, unless they wished to be colonised. Furthermore, the English School's account was relatively silent on the subjective aspect of recognition, and consequently downplayed the racism that coloured the Western powers' judgement of when a state had attained 'political maturity'. Even if a state did its best to fulfil the 'standard of civilisation', the simple fact that its ethnic makeup was not white was a good enough reason to be denied equality with the Western states.

Japan, which is seen as one of the biggest 'success stories' of a non-Western state's Westernisation and subsequent entry into international society, found this out in 1919, when its proposal for a racial equality clause in the Covenant of the League of Nations was vetoed in the Paris Peace Conference. Japan's disillusionment with the Western, white-dominated international order would later provide some of the ideological motivations for its ultimately disastrous war against the Allies in World War II.

The English School also failed to recognise that the dualisms inherent in international society were well understood by many non-European polities, and that this reflected in their entry into international society. The starkest case in point is Japan, which was the first non-European state to fulfil the 'standard of civilisation' and abolish the unequal treaties that were the hallmark of its 'uncivilised' status. The Japanese leaders and intellectuals of the time were fully

aware that the norms of coexistence only applied to the so-called ‘civilised’ states, which saw no problem with utilising decidedly ‘uncivilised’, coercive tactics towards the non-Europeans in order to force the latter to adopt European ‘civilisation’. This led the Japanese to conclude that the hallmark of a ‘civilised’ state was to become an empire, so it should lead its own ‘civilising missions’ towards its Asian neighbours. By doing so, Japan could demarcate itself from the rest of ‘uncivilised Asia’ and gain European recognition that it was now ready to join the ‘civilised’ ‘family of nations’. It was in this context that Japan embarked on a series of imperialist projects in the late nineteenth century. In this sense, one could argue that the expansion of international society served as the midwife to the birth of Japanese imperialism in the late nineteenth century (see [Box 19.8](#)).

**Box 19.8:** Discussion points

**Colonising others to become ‘civilised’**

The emergence of the Japanese empire is an important case to illustrate how a state could internalise less savoury norms that accompanied the expansion of international society. One key target of Japan’s ‘civilising mission’ was Taiwan, where the Japanese used the murder of fishermen from Okinawa as a pretext to ‘punish’ the Taiwanese aboriginal population. The Japanese took care to portray the Taiwanese aboriginal people as ‘savages’ and cannibals (even though there was no evidence to suggest this) in order to emphasise the inherently ‘civilised’ identity of Japan. Woodblock prints published in Japan depicted the Japanese soldiers in Western clothing, which also brought Japan’s identity closer to that of the West. Such portrayals mirrored Western descriptions of Asia, and were again indicative of Japan’s desire to escape ‘uncivilised’ Asia. Japan eventually colonised Taiwan in 1895, and by 1907 a

Japanese publication of Japan's rule in Taiwan was proudly proclaiming, 'Western nations have long believed that on their shoulders alone rested the responsibility of colonizing the yet unopened portions of civilisation; but now we Japanese, rising from the ocean in the extreme Orient, wish as a nation to take part in this great and glorious work' (Takekoshi [1996](#) [\[1907\]](#): vii).

## **The expansion of international society: An unfinished project?**

As we have seen, the expansion of international society was far from the progressive, peaceful impression that the English School has given. Its expansion was frequently accompanied by violence and a racist ideology that justified the extinguishing of non-European polities' rights to political self-determination. Thankfully, colonialism and racism have been discredited since the end of World War II, which resulted in many states in Asia and Africa winning their independence. Has European international society finally become a truly 'international' society, then? Have the hierarchies that characterised international society in the nineteenth century finally withered away, resulting in a society that is characterised by sovereign equality, in both theory and practice?

The answer is far from clear-cut. While it is true that the European states cannot unilaterally impose their 'standard of civilisation' and their rules on the non-European world, it is important to note that European/Western dominance is arguably still the norm in international society today. After all, the fundamental rules of the game in international society, be it international law, the sovereign states system and the norm of sovereignty, all originated in Europe, and were

written by the Europeans. In order to overthrow Western colonial dominance and participate in international society as a full member, a newly independent non-European state had no choice but to become a sovereign state and invoke sovereignty to delegitimise colonialism, which only served to reproduce the dominance of Western norms. Hedley Bull ([1984](#): 222–3) notes the irony of this:

The revolt against Western dominance ... has been conducted, as [sic] least ostensibly, in the name of ideas or values that are themselves Western ... the rights of states to sovereign equality, the rights of nations to self-determination, the rights of human beings to equal treatment irrespective of race, their rights to minimum standards of economic and social welfare. Perhaps the right to cultural autonomy may also be regarded as a Western value, or at all events as a value which Western countries ... now support.

Furthermore, it is debatable as to whether or not the ‘standard of civilisation’ that was the hallmark of colonial paternalism has been laid to rest since decolonisation. During the Cold War, the ideological standoff between the US-led Western world and the Soviet-led communist world meant that both sides were frantically cultivating allies for strategic reasons. Both sides would often provide aid and political support, regardless of the type of the regime. The end of the Cold War, however, has given rise in the West to the notion that market capitalism and liberal democratic governance are the only forms of ‘legitimate governance’ that qualify a state as a member of international society (Clark [2005](#); Fukuyama [1989](#)). Therefore, it has been argued by critics that the three criteria of liberal democracy, market capitalism and the protection of human rights have now become the new ‘standard of civilisation’ in international society (Donnelly [1998](#); Fidler [2001](#)).

Although colonisation is no longer seen as justifiable, the Western powers arguably have been able to impose their will through various channels. Economic aid now comes with ‘political conditionality’ that obliges the recipient

to undertake political reforms that entail democratisation, as well as market reforms aimed at opening up the recipient's market to external competition. The Western powers also continue to dominate international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and are able to impose their new 'standard of civilisation' through these institutions. IMF loans again frequently come with demands that the recipient country democratise and transform itself into a market capitalist state. Elsewhere, it has been argued that the 'civilising mission' is continuing in the form of [peacebuilding](#) missions that are organised by the United Nations (UN). These missions often take place in war-torn states that have been ravaged by civil war, and one key aim is to bring about some form of political stability and reconstruct the state (see [Chapter 11](#)). Interestingly, these missions' mandates aim to transform the war-torn state into a liberal democracy through the introduction of free, competitive elections – again imposing the 'standard of civilisation' of today (Paris [2002](#), [2003](#), [2004](#)). Here, some critics argue, the peoples of the host state are effectively being treated like children, incapable of charting their own course of political development. Instead, it is 'international actors' such as the United Nations that are now imposing their own vision of 'desirable', 'civilised' governance, effectively placing the host state under their tutelage in an effort to restore or create the conditions of political order.

## Conclusion

More than a hundred years have passed since the European international society expanded to become an 'international' society. It has contributed to the global spread of the sovereign state, acceptance of international law and the diplomatic system. If we are to accept the English School narrative, this should be a cause

for celebration, as it signifies the global diffusion of Western values that promote a degree of coexistence of states in an anarchical international system.

The experiences of the non-Western world highlight that such ideas are at best naïve, however. While it is true that outright colonialism and racism are now taboo, international society's coercive, 'civilising' face – arguably kept under wraps during the Cold War – remains in place, even though its political manifestations may be different. While some critics argue that international society is the bearer of a homogenising project to transform states into market capitalist liberal democracies, others, from Vattel to Bull, have emphasised the durability of international society – with the balance of power and principles of coexistence mitigating against homogenising projects.

Finally, it would be foolish to think that the non-Western world is somehow satisfied with the current international order, now that its members have attained full membership of international society and are now ostensibly 'sovereign equals' to the Western powers. Analysts often seem blind to the contradictory dynamic in the non-Western world noted above, which simultaneously admires certain aspects of Western-originated ideologies or systems of governance and remains suspicious of the coercive, 'civilising' face of international society, strongly resenting what it sees as ethnocentric notions of Western moral superiority. Such sentiments manifest themselves in persistent anti-Western demonstrations throughout the world, as well as persistent failures on the part of the West to transplant Western-styled governance (Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya are potential examples of this).

These complex dynamics cannot be understood without reference to the historical processes that accompanied the expansion of international society. They also point to the limitations of the Eurocentrism that continues to influence our theorising of international politics. Future studies of international politics

need to be more inclusive of the non-Western world, and it is hoped that this chapter provokes further thinking about embarking on this endeavour.

## Discussion questions

**19.1** What are the differences between an international system and an international society?

**19.2** Should we be glad that the European international society has spread across the world to become a global ‘international society’ today?

**19.3** Are the rules of international society Eurocentric?

**19.4** Will ‘rising powers’ such as India, China or Brazil result in the eventual disappearance of the ‘standard of civilisation’ characterised by a demand for democratic governance and market capitalism?

**19.5** Does contemporary international society have the right to impose its own vision of ‘legitimate statehood’ on war-torn states or ‘failed states’ in today’s context?

## *Further reading*

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Buzan, Barry 2014, *An introduction to the English school of international relations: The societal approach*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *A comprehensive survey of the English school's historical, structural and normative orientations to IR.*

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Byrd J.A. 2011, *The transit of empire: Indigenous critiques of colonialism*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. *Develops a critique of the dominant US approach to 'indigeneity' as facilitating empire, both at home and abroad.*

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Keal, Paul 2003, *European conquest and the rights of indigenous peoples: The moral backwardness of international society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *A critical account of the coercion that accompanied the expansion of international society.*

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*order in world politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A key work that presents a historical and theoretical account of the two faces of international society that aim for coexistence and 'civilisation'.

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Linklater, Andrew and Suganami, Hidemi 2006, *The English School of international relations: A contemporary reassessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. An impressive assessment of the English School's contribution to the study of IR by two leading theorists.

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Shaw, K. 2008, *Indigeneity and political theory: Sovereignty and the limits of the political*, London: Routledge. Argues for a critical analysis of sovereignty and international relations from the perspective of Indigenous politics.

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Suzuki, Shogo 2009, *Civilization and empire: China and Japan's encounters with European international society*, London: Routledge. Drawing on the historical experiences of China and Japan, this book provides a detailed account of how the Chinese and Japanese dealt with the dualities of European international society.

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Wilmer F. 1993, *The Indigenous voice in world politics: Since time immemorial*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage. Documents the changing position of Indigenous peoples in global politics with particular attention paid to the growth of international Indigenous activism.

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# Diplomacy



**Geoffrey Wiseman and Paul Sharp**

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[Defining diplomacy: What is diplomacy and who are the diplomats?](#)

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## Introduction

This chapter makes three main arguments. First, ideas and practices of [diplomacy](#) have a multi-millennial history – much longer than is generally thought. Second, this long history has been characterised by both continuity and change. As a result, diplomacy has been as much adaptive as resistant to change. Third, diplomacy is not diminishing in importance and both it and the diplomats who carry it out should be regarded as evolving and as important to the [theory](#)

and practice of international relations. To assess these claims, the chapter first addresses the issue of defining diplomacy, before examining the evolution of diplomacy in terms that may be characterised broadly as pre-modern, modern and [postmodern](#). The relationship between diplomacy and the study of international relations (IR) is then evaluated.

## **Defining diplomacy: What is diplomacy and who are the diplomats?**

Diplomacy is conventionally understood as the processes and institutions by which the interests and identities of [sovereign states](#) are represented to one another. Diplomats are understood to be people accredited by those they represent to undertake this work. We should be careful with definitions, however (see [Box 20.1](#) for examples). They clarify the ways in which people use a term; however, they do not capture its true meaning, if there is such a thing, or its best use. Thus some definitions of diplomacy emphasise a particular diplomatic *activity* – for example, negotiation (Nicolson [1969](#)). Others stress the *manner* in which the activity should be undertaken – for example, with honesty, tact and understanding (Callières [2000 \[1717\]](#); Satow [1979 \[1917\]](#)) or peacefully (Berridge [2015](#)). Still others pay attention to *who* is entitled to undertake it and on behalf of whom – claiming, for example, that only the official representatives of sovereign states and international organisations may properly be viewed as engaging in diplomacy (Vienna Convention 1961). Rather than trying to pin down the best definitions of diplomacy and diplomats, therefore, it is more interesting to chart how and why the popularity and use of different ones changed over time and from place to place. Why, for example, did Edmund Burke feel the need in 1797 to Anglicise the French term *diplomatie* (Burke

[1899](#) [[1797](#)]: 450)? Why, in the United States, is the distinction between diplomacy and foreign policy less widely acknowledged than it is in Europe (Kissinger [1994](#); Clinton [2011](#))? And why, nearly everywhere, do people now seek to broaden the use of the term and call a wide range of humanitarian, cultural and commercial activities diplomacy, and whoever undertakes them diplomats (Leonard and Alakeson [2000](#))?

### **Box 20.1: Terminology**

#### **Some definitions of diplomacy**

Diplomacy is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states, extending sometimes also to their relations with vassal states; or, more briefly still, the conduct of business between states by peaceful means.

(Satow [1979](#) [[1917](#)]: 1)

Diplomacy is the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business or art of the diplomatist.

(Harold Nicolson [1969](#) [[1939](#)]: 4–5)

[Diplomacy is] the conduct of relations between states and other entities with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means.

(Bull [1977](#): 162)

Diplomacy is concerned with the management of relations between states and other actors. From a state perspective diplomacy is concerned with advising, shaping and implementing foreign policy.

(Barston [1988](#): 1)

Diplomacy is the conduct of international relations by negotiation rather than by force, propaganda, or recourse to law, and by other peaceful means (such as gathering information or engendering goodwill) which are either directly or indirectly designed to promote negotiation.

(Berridge [2015](#): 1)

Diplomacy is the peaceful conduct of relations amongst political entities, their principals and accredited agents.

(Hamilton and Langhorne [2011](#): 1)

Diplomacy is conventionally said to refer to the processes and institutions by which states [and others with standing] represent themselves and their interests in the conduct of their relations with one another.

(Sharp [2009](#): 1)

# The evolution of diplomacy

## Pre-modern diplomacy

Something like diplomacy must have occurred between peoples in pre-history once messengers were granted immunity from the usual unfriendly rules governing relations with strangers (Nicolson [1969](#)). Archaeological and anthropological research, however, casts doubt on the idea of communities evolving separately until encountering others. Rather, the record suggests a single group from which peoples separated early on, and processes of peoples both coming together and pulling apart ever since (Buzan and Little [2000](#); Diamond [1997](#)). There are historical records of negotiations in the Old Testament, and older fragments exist including an archive of relations between pharaohs, their clients and other great kings in the fourteenth century BCE (Amarna). From the latter, we obtain glimpses of missions travelling with trade caravans to arrange dynastic marriages, secure gifts, reassure allies and negotiate with rivals. For some, this is the first diplomatic system, and it illustrates how diplomacy is ‘hard-wired’ into the human species (Cohen and Westbrook [2000](#)). For others, the Amarna period fails the test of being a proper diplomatic system because the parties exhibit no self-restraint in the interests of preserving their system (Butterfield [1970](#)) and achieve no institutional expression of that system – for example, resident embassies (Berridge [2015](#)).

The answer to the question of when diplomacy started, as argued above, seems bound up with how diplomacy is defined and by whom. For example, until very recently it has been conventional in the Western world to interpret the

earlier diplomatic experience of humanity as a precursor to the emergence of modern diplomacy in seventeenth-century Europe. In this story, while most peoples only managed to send missions when there was something to negotiate, the Greeks are distinguished by their permitting *proxenoi* (local citizens) to represent them, although without plenipotentiary (negotiating) powers (Hamilton and Langhorne [2011](#)). The Romans, as [hegemons](#), are presented as uninterested in the give-and-take of diplomacy (Nicolson [1954](#)). The Renaissance Italians, in contrast, are credited with preparing the ground for modern diplomacy (Mattingly [1955](#)). They established permanent resident missions (embassies) whose ministers (ambassadors) had plenipotentiary powers and developed a collective sense of themselves as a diplomatic corps, sharing common professional interests and values (Sharp and Wiseman [2007](#)). As for the rest of the world – China, India, the Americas and Africa – their diplomatic achievements are judged to be unimportant since they eventually were absorbed by the expansion of Europe's international society (Bull and Watson [1984](#)).

As we shall see below, this story of how modern diplomacy emerged and was perfected in its essentials remains important and useful. However, as [power](#) now appears to be shifting away from Europe and America – and indeed, power itself may be transforming in such ways as to make sovereign states less powerful and important – there is a growing sense that the conventional story does not exhaust all the possibilities for diplomacy. Recently, therefore, interest has revived in how diplomacy used to be conducted in Europe before its states-system was consolidated; in other parts of the world before the Europeans arrived; and between the Europeans and indigenous peoples they encountered (Jennings et al. [1985](#)). Interest has also revived in how so-called primitive peoples conducted (and in some cases still conduct) their diplomatic relations with others (Andersen and Neumann [2012](#); Midtrød [2012](#); Numelin [1950](#)).

## **Modern diplomacy in the Westphalian era**

Modern diplomacy generally is associated with the traditional agenda of sovereign states (especially the larger, more powerful ones), the [balance of power](#), [war](#), [international law](#) and [diplomacy](#) (Bull 2002). Modern diplomacy essentially can be divided into two forms: [bilateral](#) and [multilateral](#). Seen as the older, more traditional form, bilateral diplomacy is the conduct of relations between two political actors with ‘standing’ – usually sovereign territorial states. Multilateral diplomacy – the conduct of relations between three or more such states – is seen as a ‘newer’ form of diplomacy.

As noted above, diplomatic historians tend to see modern diplomacy in its bilateral form as having emerged on the Italian peninsula during the Renaissance. The key diplomatic players of the time included Florence, Venice, Naples, Milan and the papacy in Rome. Machiavelli, the Florentine diplomat who authored *The Prince* (1998 [1513]) and other works on how best to negotiate with other sovereigns, did so in terms that are now synonymous with a [power politics](#) worldview (Berridge et al. 2001: 13). Thus, as we noted above, Renaissance Italy’s main contribution to the development of the ideas and practices of diplomacy was the creation of resident ambassadors. On this model, and unlike in the past when ambassadors tended to go on short-term diplomatic missions, ambassadors would reside in the host country for years, sending reports to their governments back home by whatever means were available. A product of the exchange of resident diplomats, as noted earlier, was the development of a diplomatic corps, the corporate collection of diplomats in any one capital, from Constantinople to London (Sharp and Wiseman 2007).

Many scholars regard the Treaties of [Westphalia](#) (1648), which ended Europe’s Thirty Years’ War between Protestants and Catholics, as formalising (but by no means inventing) the principle of state [sovereignty](#), and thus ‘ushering in the era of modern diplomacy’ (Stanger 2009: 56). Thus

Westphalia's association with the sovereign state became synonymous with modern diplomacy. Even though the resident bilateral diplomatic mission emerged earlier, in the fifteenth century, Westphalia's importance in the seventeenth century was that it both represented and constituted the notion of modern diplomacy. However, while Westphalia's significance usually is associated with the rise of modern sovereign-state diplomacy, it is equally significant as a major step in the development of multilateral diplomacy (Hamilton and Langhorne [2011](#); Davis Cross [2007](#)). In short, Westphalia reinforced bilateral diplomacy, which was already recognisable on the Italian peninsula, while also pointing to a more multilateral future for diplomacy.

With bilateral diplomacy (the resident mission) and multilateral diplomacy (such as the congresses surrounding Westphalia) in place by the seventeenth century, other innovations followed. Notable here was the invention by Cardinal Richelieu – first minister of France under Louis XIII from 1624 to 1642 – of the foreign ministry: the now taken-for-granted institution under one roof in a country's capital that works with government ministers to formulate foreign policy and supervises a country's international network of diplomats and embassies (Berridge et al. [2001](#)). Thus was born the idea of the professional diplomat as a key feature of modern diplomacy and international relations.

For most writers on diplomacy, the diplomacy of the [great powers](#) mattered most. They were supposed to be responsible for maintaining the balance of power but, as the Napoleonic Wars had demonstrated, were also capable of posing deadly threats to the peace of Europe. Great-power dominance of modern diplomacy's evolution is well demonstrated by the ensuing Concert of Europe, an informal yet powerful periodic meeting of European states that negotiated treaties, but typically did not meet in a single assembly (plenary) that would have allowed the smaller powers a larger voice in proceedings. Thus, the Concert of Europe was dominated by exclusive meetings of the leading

statesmen from Austria, Prussia, Russia, Britain and France, such as Prince Metternich (Austria), Lord Castlereagh (Britain) and Prince Talleyrand (France). The Concert is widely associated with a period of relative [peace](#) in Europe for much of the nineteenth century and up to the outbreak of war in 1914.

In diplomacy's long history, World War I (1914–18) stands out for two reasons. First, the war was blamed on diplomats conducting the 'old diplomacy' of secret treaties, shifting [alliances](#) and great-power backroom deals. Second, in the war's aftermath, the multilateral method was taken to a new institutionalised level with the creation of the League of Nations (the 'new diplomacy'). Under the League, diplomats conducting multilateral diplomacy would no longer meet for a few days at a time in a European capital and then return home (on the Concert model). Now some diplomats at least would permanently be accredited to an international organisation, rather than to a country. This represented an important conceptual shift – albeit one that failed in this instance, with the disbandment of the League following World War II, which it manifestly failed to prevent.

However, the establishment of the [United Nations](#) in San Francisco in 1945 (Schlesinger [2003](#)) represented a further, and this time more successful, attempt at institutionalising the multilateral diplomatic method (see [Chapter 22](#)). An important lesson seemed to be that sovereign states were willing to try again, rather than give up on a promising idea. World War II had also initiated renewed interest in the role of public opinion in the formation of foreign policy, and to some extent in its conduct by professional diplomats. After the war, the ideological conflict known as the [Cold War](#) (roughly 1945–89) saw the re-emergence and general acceptance of institutionalised multilateralism (Thakur [2002](#)), with the establishment of the extensive UN system – even if there was a sense that the UN was not central to the diplomacy of the great-power contest that was surfacing at the time (Mazower [2009](#)). Traditional bilateral diplomacy,

so vilified after World War I, continued in a new conceptual guise known as [bipolarity](#) – under this wider concept, large numbers of countries lined up, some of them reluctantly, behind the US and Soviet [superpowers](#). The main features of this Cold War diplomacy included nuclear diplomacy, crisis diplomacy and summit diplomacy (White [2005](#): 392–3). The advent of nuclear weapons and their use against Japan by the United States in 1945 introduced a novel and sharply dangerous element into the management of crises and the convening of high-level meetings by political leaders. If the over-riding strategic concept of the nuclear age was mutual nuclear [deterrence](#), the underlying foreign policy concept was [containment](#) – an idea advanced by George Kennan, a serving professional US diplomat, that Soviet [communism](#) could be managed (contained) without the use of military force (see [Box 20.2](#)).

#### **Box 20.2:** Discussion points

##### **George Kennan's view of the emerging bipolar Cold War**

[Soviet communism is] a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with US there can be no permanent *modus vivendi* ... [The] problem of how to cope with this force [is] undoubtedly greatest task our diplomacy has ever faced and probably greatest it will ever have to face ... But I would like to record my conviction that problem is within our power to solve – and that without recourse to any general military conflict.

Source: February 1946 Kennan 'Long Telegram' (Jensen [1993](#): 28, 29).

[Decolonisation](#) provided an important context in which Cold War diplomacy played out. This process whereby the colonies of the European powers achieved their juridical independence had a dramatic impact on international relations in general, and diplomacy in particular. First, as just noted, while many of the newly independent countries identified and allied with one or the other superpowers, many others sought to keep some political distance from them, forming groupings such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77 ([G77](#)) in order to strengthen their independence from the Cold War giants. A small minority of the new states, such as China, Cuba and Libya, branded themselves, or were seen by others, as revolutionary states, at first rejecting but later accepting diplomatic [norms](#) and procedures (Armstrong [1993](#); Bull and Watson [1984](#)).

**Box 20.3:** Discussion points

**Proliferation of sovereign states**

**1919:** 25 states participated in the Paris Peace Conference, formally ending World War I and setting up the League of Nations.

**1945:** 51 states participated in the 1945 San Francisco Conference, establishing the United Nations.

**1990:** the United Nations has 159 member states.

**2016:** the United Nations has 193 member states.

A second effect of decolonisation was a dramatic proliferation of sovereign states in the international system. Some 51 countries signed the [UN Charter](#) in 1945. By 1989, the membership of the United Nations had grown to 159. In 2016, the world body had 193 members (see [Box 20.3](#)). At the United Nations, the impact of the proliferation of new states had two almost contradictory effects: radicalisation and socialisation. *Radicalisation* was manifested in claims for economic and social development and declarations like the infamous 1975 Zionism is Racism General Assembly resolution. *Socialisation* was manifested, for example, in acceptance of the idea that the United Nations now acted as the membership committee for the international community (where previously this had been left to countries acting bilaterally). In addition, new members generally accepted the norms and routine practices of UN-style multilateral diplomacy (Wiseman [2011](#)). In short, the trappings of sovereignty – embassies, ambassadors and UN membership – were attractive at a time when the political goal was sovereign independence. Given the divisions created by the Cold War and the decolonisation process, it is striking that the international community could come together to agree – in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations – on the formal rules governing their diplomatic conduct (Langhorne [1992](#)). The Convention set out the five key tasks of diplomacy (See [Box 20.4](#)). It also codified the immunities and privileges accorded to diplomats while serving abroad (see [Box 20.5](#)).

**Box 20.4:** Key texts

**The 1961 Vienna Convention: Functions of a diplomatic mission**

According to Article 3 of the 1961 Vienna Convention, the functions of a diplomatic mission consist, among other things, in (emphasis added):

- a** *Representing* the sending State in the receiving State;

- b** *Protecting* in the receiving State the interests of the sending State and of its nationals, within the limits permitted by international law;
- c** *Negotiating* with the Government of the receiving State;
- d** Ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving State, and *reporting* thereon to the Government of the sending State;
- e** *Promoting friendly relations* between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations.

#### **Box 20.5:** Key texts

##### **The 1961 Vienna Convention: Diplomatic immunity**

Under the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, diplomats cannot be arrested, no matter what their crime; they cannot be forced to testify in court proceedings, unless their home state ‘waives’ (lifts) their immunity. The host state may expel them, declaring them *persona non grata* (Leguey-Feuilleux [2009](#): 155–6).

On 3 January, 1997, sixteen-year-old Joviane Waltrick was killed in a five-car pileup at Dupont Circle in Washington, DC, caused by the second-ranking diplomat at the Georgian embassy, Gueorgui Makharadze, who was allegedly intoxicated. The US State Department formally requested that the Georgian government not withdraw the diplomat from the United States, and that it ‘waive’ his diplomatic immunity so that he could stand trial. Secretary of State Warren

Christopher reaffirmed these requests in a letter to the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze. On 10 January 1997, President Shevardnadze announced in the Georgian capital, Tblisi, that he would waive Makharadze's diplomatic immunity. The State Department described the gesture as 'unusual' and 'courageous'. Several months later, on 17–18 July, Shevardnadze visited the United States, meeting with President Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and senior State Department officials. Makharadze's trial began on 21 July 1997. He was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to between seven and twenty-one years in a federal prison. In 2000, Makharadze was repatriated from the United States to his home country, Georgia, to serve the rest of his term. He was released in 2002, after a total of some five years in prison.

Case written by Minta N. Spencer. See also 'Jailed Georgian Sent Home,' *The New York Times*, 1 July 2000.

How does diplomacy operate under hegemonic conditions? Until recently, it has been common to talk of a [unipolar](#) world, as distinct from a bipolar or even [multipolar](#) one, revolving around the sole remaining superpower, the US. The Cold War's end in 1989 led to yet another expansion of international society, with the addition of over twenty new countries from the disintegrating Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, a series of events that reinforced the persistence of sovereignty and a state-based diplomatic culture (Wiseman [2005](#); cf. Dittmer and McConnell, [2016](#)). And, even as the rise of emerging powers such as Brazil, India, China and South Africa challenges any unipolar US claims, the new powers in no way suggest that these power shifts will be undertaken without diplomacy and diplomats.

This early post-Cold War conventional wisdom was that the US conducted a form of hegemonic diplomacy, not unlike imperial Rome. As former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali ([1999](#): 198) remarked pointedly in his memoirs: ‘The Roman Empire had no need for diplomacy. Nor does the United States’. In fact, the US conducts its relations unilaterally, bilaterally, and multilaterally. The George W. Bush administration tended to emphasise the unilateral (while in practice operating in all three spheres); the Obama administration tended to emphasise the multilateral (while also in practice operating in all three spheres) in ways that no other country can presently match (Schlesinger [2008](#)). The incoming Trump administration seems to threaten a radical bilateralism which will default to a similarly radical unilateralism if satisfaction is not promptly obtained, but no doubt it will settle on its own mix of all three forms of diplomacy.

Yet, as we discuss further below, there are countervailing trends pointing to a world less dominated by a state-based diplomatic culture grounded unmistakably in sovereignty. The United Nations today is not simply a meeting place for over 190 sovereign state diplomats, but is becoming an amalgam of players from the sovereign, business and non-governmental worlds, where sovereignty-questioning norms such as the [responsibility to protect \(R2P\)](#) – the idea that the international community could intervene with force after the state had failed to protect its own citizens – are evolving (Evans and Sahnoun [2002](#)) (see [Chapter 31](#)).

To sum up this section, the norms, assumptions and practices of the modern Westphalian institution of diplomacy partly originated in ancient forms of practice dating back to the Amarna era; however, they are also impressively different and, as we now argue, still useful.

### **The future of diplomacy in a post-Westphalian world**

Prediction is always difficult – especially in the social sciences. The relationship between the social world and people’s ideas about it is complex, and scholars argue about what is changing and what is meant by change. Consider the question of whether or not sovereign states and their diplomacy are disappearing. Common sense suggests they are not. In fact, there are probably more states and more diplomatic missions now than at any time before the unifications of Italy and Germany in the nineteenth century (1861 and 1871 respectively). Reflection suggests they might be disappearing. It is possible that states and their diplomacy are no longer what they were once presented as being: the most important actors and processes in international politics. The world no longer turns on cable traffic between the embassies and chancelleries of a few great powers as it did in August 1914, at the start of World War I. To complicate matters further, however, empirical analysis reveals that states were never as sovereign or as important as was assumed in their heyday. August 1914 was an exceptional and decisive moment, perhaps, but outside the parameters set by that great power crisis, there was a great deal of international relations going on, to which sovereign states, their foreign offices and their diplomats were far from central. In considering the future of diplomacy, therefore, we begin by acknowledging that at any given moment one can identify a number of possible trends, and that the present is always capable of yielding multiple possible futures – although some do seem more likely than others (Henrikson [2006](#); Sending, Pouliot and Neumann [2015](#)).

## **Trends**

### **Modern diplomacy still rules**

The most obvious trend is the persistence of the Westphalian or modern system of diplomacy noted above, and outlined in the previous section. In general, sovereign states still seem to be regarded as the most important actors in international relations, and they continue to deploy an extensive system of embassies and consulates by which they and their interests are represented to each other. In particular cases, this claim can be modified. Budgetary constraints, for example, can result in the closure of missions or, together with political developments like regional associations such as the European Union, can result in various forms of shared or collective representation. The claim that [globalisation](#) – developments in the technologies of travel, communication and information-transfer, together with the ensuing ‘collapse of distance’ (see [Chapter 28](#)) – has rendered on-the-spot diplomatic representation unimportant has so far not been substantiated. Indeed, the need for such representation – especially in the great diplomatic cities of big powers and international organisations, continues unabated, leading some to speak of a ‘diplomatic counter-revolution’ in terms of the persistence and extension of traditional diplomatic practices (Berridge [2015](#): 253–5).

### **Less negotiating, more representation and lobbying**

There has been a shift away from traditional diplomatic functions like negotiating and reporting towards both traditional and new forms of representation. Sovereign states may still be the most important actors, but their sovereignty seems to buy them less independence, security and prosperity than in the past, on an international stage that they now have to share with other sorts of international actors. Increasingly, they must engage in ‘triangular’ or ‘polylateral’ diplomacy (Strange [1992](#); Wiseman [2004](#)). As a result, diplomats spend more time lobbying important political and economic actors in their host

states than would previously have been considered appropriate, given the core diplomatic principle of non-interference in internal affairs and domestic matters. They spend more time engaged in representation contributing to the construction of favourable images of their own country's identity, interests and values through public diplomacy than would have previously have been regarded as important, given that these activities do not typically target governments (Cull [2009](#); Fitzpatrick [2007](#); Zaharna et al. [2013](#)). Diplomats also spend more time building local and temporary coalitions of private and public actors to influence policy networks in their host states, internationally and in their home states (Hocking [1999](#)).

### **Getting out of the embassy**

Some diplomats – particularly those of developed and Western states – increasingly are engaged in ‘transformational’ or ‘civilian power’ diplomacy, working in state and civil society ‘capacity-building’ teams with other experts, especially in countries from which insurgent or terrorist movements operate (Clinton [2010](#); Rice [2007](#)). However, the strength and significance of this trend remain unclear. It seems very novel to have diplomats leaving their missions to work out in the field alongside aid workers, civil engineers, doctors and soldiers, helping communities to build schools, clinics and systems of governance capable of resisting the pressures of terrorists, smugglers and gangsters. However, still unclear is the extent to which the fate of these activities is bound up with the fate of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and whether diplomats will be seen to have much of a role to play in them after all. Nor is it clear how these activities differ from those of the political officer in the old European empires, although this is a parallel that none of the parties involved has an interest in drawing. One possible indicator of growing significance will be rising powers such as China and India

adopting the same technique of attaching diplomats to their own development teams around the world.

### **The rise of the hyphenated diplomat**

The terms ‘diplomat’ and ‘ambassador’ increasingly are being applied to people who are not officially engaged in the representation of sovereign states and the adjustment of their interests. As noted above, international and regional organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union have long enjoyed diplomatic standing and the right to diplomatic representation among states. Individuals working independently or in a semi-official capacity have long been employed by states to seek agreements and secure interests when conventional diplomacy has been judged to be ineffective or inappropriate. To these can be added field-diplomats and track two-diplomats, who work in zones of conflict to secure ceasefires between warring militias and protect non-combatants when fighting is going on (Autesserre [2014](#); Reychler [1996](#)); goodwill-ambassadors and celebrity-diplomats, who work to raise consciousness about humanitarian and environmental issues, lobbying those in a position to help and pressuring those causing problems (Cooper [2008](#)); and citizen-diplomats, who may seek to advance the profile and interests of their home towns in trade delegations and through cultural exchanges, act as international civil society lobbyists or attempt to get around or subvert a particular aspect of their own country’s foreign policy with which they disagree – for example, US citizen diplomacy toward Cuba (Sharp [2001](#); LeoGrande [2015](#)).

The rise of the hyphenated diplomats nicely illustrates the problems with considering the future of diplomacy. To the question ‘What will the future look like?’ has to be added another: ‘What will people in the future regard as significant in it?’ A European cardinal from the fifteenth century, for example,

might be reassured to see the network of Vatican diplomacy still in place today, but slow to recognise that people's attitudes to it are now very different from those of his own time. There will likely be a British ambassador in Paris fifty years from now, but will they be a 'go-to' person for French people seeking to influence their British counterparts, or will both sets of citizens, along with the other six billion inhabitants of the world, basically engage in their own direct diplomacy with one another? If so, then what – if anything – will be diplomatic about those relations? How would setting up opportunities for commercial, social or cultural partnerships between people from different countries be distinguishable from similar efforts between people from the same country? Is diplomacy changing, therefore, or is it in the process of fading away as international relations become more like other ordinary human relations (Constantinou [2013](#))?

## **Diplomacy and the study of International Relations**

The contemporary study of diplomacy is beginning to explore questions such as these. Like anyone else, IR scholars bring to the task their own assumptions about what is going on and what is important. Thus [neo-realists](#) insist that there is an unavoidable dynamic to international politics which persists whether we like it or not (Waltz [1979](#)). States and their diplomacy – or something so very like both that they may be treated as such – will always exist because people live in a law-governed natural universe that constrains possibilities. Witness, they argue, the way the European Union, set up as an attempt to break from the violent international politics of sovereign states, is rapidly acquiring the characteristics of a great power, including its own diplomats in the form of its

External Action Service. [Constructivists](#), in contrast, suggest that the social world is much more produced by the way we think about it than people realise (Wendt [1999](#)). Sovereign states and the sorts of diplomacy associated with them exist only insofar as people accept the claim that they do. In principle at least, people could consciously think and act themselves into an entirely different set of social relations in which the claims of states to sovereignty would no longer be accepted, and diplomacy as their privileged form of intercourse would fade into irrelevance. Indeed, some people suggest that this may already be happening, and that today's hyphenated diplomats are harbingers of a post-sovereign and post-state world (Wellman [2004](#)). Others, in contrast, note what they regard as people's capacity for wishful thinking in the face of underlying, unchanging and brutish facts (Carr 1946[1939]; Mearsheimer [2001](#)).

As noted above, however, an alternative to fitting diplomacy into broader theories of IR is to examine the circumstances in which people use terms like diplomacy and ambassador. There are shallow reasons, to be sure. Both terms are associated with power and status. Thus public *diplomacy* was so named by US officials because they thought public *relations* would put them at a disadvantage in the competition for resources and influence (Fitzpatrick [2007](#): 189), and all sorts of people are proclaimed 'ambassadors' when they seek support for causes generally regarded as good. Both terms surface, however, when people talk about relations with people whom they regard as 'other' and 'outsiders' from whom they feel different. This sense of difference may be malign and take the form of an alienation and estrangement that allows us to treat people badly (Der Derian [1987](#)). It can also be benign, however, acknowledging the value of diversity and the different ways in which human communities can live (Constantinou [1996](#), [2013](#)). Either way, the sense of separateness and difference leads to a special sort of human relations, different from those within groups, requiring special handling and, arguably, a special

class of people (diplomats) adept at handling them in such a way as to avoid unwanted conflict (Sharp [2009](#)). To the extent that this is so, then we should neither want nor expect diplomacy to disappear – even if sovereign states and their foreign policies do.

## **Conclusion**

Our review of the pre-modern, modern and postmodern ideas of diplomacy confirms a very long history indeed. Even if there is disagreement about the pre-modern origins of diplomatic practices in forms that we would recognise today, there is little doubt that diplomacy preceded the sovereign states-system. Throughout these three broad historical periods, our review provided many examples of a diplomatic system that is capable of reproducing itself, but also of reconstituting itself in significantly different forms. The evidence of diplomacy from the pre-Westphalian period is important, because it seriously challenges the state-diplomacy link assumed in the literature and indeed by many, although no means all, contemporary practitioners. We can therefore imagine a future without the state. But as we have conceived of the subject here, we cannot imagine any future without diplomacy. Even within the context of a state-based international order, diplomacy is becoming more important because it and the people who are said to practise it are increasingly needed (Sharp [2009](#)). Moreover, if international relations are indeed moving in a post-hegemonic direction, then diplomacy is more likely to prosper. In one form or another, the United States, China and other major players see advantage in returning to it. Moreover, there is clear evidence of an emerging non-state diplomatic conception in which well-organised groups are now acting, or claiming to act, diplomatically – at least in a minimal sense, even if not yet in the full Vienna

Convention sense. Students of IR therefore need a good understanding of diplomacy and diplomats, and the many conceptual issues involved.

## **Discussion questions**

**20.1** Can we continue to place trust in diplomacy at universal organisations such as the UN, or do we need to build regional and even localised diplomatic structures?

**20.2** Do you think that the concept of diplomatic immunity serves a useful purpose in today's mixed-actor world of states and non-state actors? Make the best possible case in favour of the concept and then make the case for its abolition. Can and should diplomatic immunity exist in a future non-sovereign-state world?

**20.3** Identify the ways that we as human beings all think diplomatically on a day-to-day basis – for example, in the ways we present ourselves to a professor as a student and our communications reflect the presumed etiquette, protocols and power relations involved.

**20.4** Do the personal characteristics of an American president, or indeed any leader, impact the country's diplomacy? If so, how? Compare the presidencies of George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald J. Trump.

## *Further reading*

Berridge, G.R. 2015, *Diplomacy: Theory and practice*, 5th ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. *The standard text on the diplomacy of states, focusing on the activity of negotiation, bilateral and multilateral modes of diplomacy plus*

*summitry and mediation.*

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Cooper A.F. 2014, *Diplomatic afterlives*. Cambridge: Polity Press. *Uncovers the emerging phenomenon of life after politics for world leaders with global celebrity status. It explains and conceptualises the trend, carefully scrutinising its limits and opportunities for global governance.*

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Hamilton, Keith and Langhorne, Richard 2011, *The practice of diplomacy: Its evolution, theory and administration*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge. *A wide-ranging historical treatment of how the institution of diplomacy developed.*

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Jönsson, Christer and Hall, Martin 2005, *Essence of diplomacy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. *A sociological study of diplomatic practice, which interprets diplomacy as a sub-set of standard human behaviours that seek to mediate between universals and particulars through communication, representation and reproduction.*

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Nicolson, Harold 1954, *The evolution of the diplomatic method*, London: Macmillan. *These essays take great liberties in terms of the national stereotyping of diplomatic methods, but are valuable for their insights and for what they reveal about the outlook of the classical diplomatist.*

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Pouliot, Vincent 2015, *International pecking orders: The politics and practices of multilateral diplomacy*, New York: Cambridge University Press. *Compellingly demonstrates that the distribution of a country's material resources can only partly account for the fact that not all ambassadors carry the same weight at the multilateral negotiating table. Rather, multilateral diplomats produce, reproduce and sometimes compete in an informal hierarchy of influence to which practitioners refer as the 'international pecking order'.*

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Sharp, Paul 2009, *Diplomatic theory of international relations*, New York:

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Cambridge University Press. *This book argues that diplomats have characteristic ways of viewing international relations and what is important in them, which is neglected by academics and other experts, but from which much is to be learned.*

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Sharp, Paul and Wiseman, Geoffrey (eds) 2007, *The diplomatic corps as an institution of international society*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. *Presents a series of case studies testing the thesis that diplomats stationed in the world's capitals constitute an epistemic entity engaging in socialisation practices, many of them internalised, with significance for international society.*

21

# Great powers



**Marco Cesa**

[Introduction](#)

[What is a great power?](#)

[The great powers in historical perspective](#)

[The great powers in the theory of International Relations](#)

[Tom Chodor: Rising powers and transformations in the international order](#)

[The great powers after the Cold War](#)

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## Introduction

One of the fundamental characteristics of any international system is the distribution of **power** among **states**. The sheer fact that states are unequal in

terms of power entails a number of important implications for international politics. For example, while the desires and concerns of weak states are often neglected, the demands of strong states usually shape the international agenda; relations among strong states, in turn, significantly affect patterns of international stability, [order](#) and change. In short, if you want to shed light on some basic dynamics of international affairs, for analytical or practical purposes, always ask yourself a set of very simple questions: How is power distributed among states? Which are the strong states? How do they stand in relation to each other? Although the relationship of forces is by no means the only explanatory variable at play, it frequently goes a long way in accounting for who gets what, when and how on the international stage.

What we have generically called ‘strong states’ are often referred to as [great powers](#). At first sight, the definition of ‘great power’ seems unproblematic. After all, do we not know who the great powers are today? And do we not know who the great powers were in, say, the nineteenth century? Do we not recognise a great power when we see one? Yet if we look closer and try to come up with a working definition, things immediately get more complicated. The next section of this chapter will therefore focus on the attributes of a great power, on the elements – or the combination of elements – that allow us to tell a great power from other states. Such a conceptual effort will be followed by a brief historical regression intended to show the role played by the great powers in the modern and contemporary [international systems](#). Next we will examine the main theories of International Relations (IR) that claim to explain broad patterns of cooperation and conflict between great powers. Some emphasise the special *functions* that great powers perform; some rely on the *number* of the existing great powers; some identify in the *rise and decline* of the great powers the basic force behind international change. The last section will assess the

relevance of the established knowledge for the post-[Cold War](#) international system.

## What is a great power?

In the social sciences, the notion of ‘power’ refers to a *relationship*: A exerts power over B when A induces B to do something that it would not otherwise do. Once this relational dimension has been established, analysis often shifts to the *means* through which A is able to affect B’s actions. What, then, are the ingredients of power in international politics? Scholars usually offer detailed lists, mostly of a descriptive nature: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence, technological development, national character and morale. The most convincing conceptualisation is presented by the French sociologist and political theorist Raymond Aron ([1966](#): 54), who groups the various components of power into three main categories:

the power of a collectivity depends on the theater of its action and on its capacity to use available material and human resources. *Milieu, resources, collective action*, such are, from every evidence, whatever the century and whatever the forms of competition among political units, the determinants of power.

In other words, in assessing the power of any given state at any given time we must look at the *space* it occupies and within which it is active, the *quantity and the quality* of implements and combatants, and finally the *organisation* of the armed forces, the quality of military and civilian leadership in [war](#) and [peace](#), and the ways in which citizens react to the test of war. While the three terms – *milieu, resources* and *collective action* – have some universal value, they also

suggest how to investigate change: resources and collective action are always a function of historical contingencies. Only the environment – or, more precisely, the terrain (e.g. mountains, deserts, sheer size) – seems to display some persistent implications: from the nineteenth century to the present day, the British, the Russians and the Americans have all found it hard to pacify Afghanistan. Yet, depending on the existing technology, insular powers such as Britain and the United States have been invulnerable or vulnerable: what used to be a strategic chokepoint may become a simple geographical detail, and the air and the sea always offer new communication lanes – not to mention the broad geographical context in which action takes place. For most of human history, power projection capabilities were limited to a region or to a continent. But ever since the sixteenth century, although one can still conceive of ‘regional great powers’ – Prussia in the eighteenth century or Habsburg Austria throughout its history – the major actors on the international scene have had worldwide interests, as well as the means to protect them.

The multidimensional nature of power should never be forgotten. Great powers do not achieve and keep their rank by scoring high on a single item. Australia and Canada are endowed with large territories, yet they hardly qualify as great powers. Japan can now rely on the world’s third largest GDP, yet its formidable economic resources do not translate into a commensurate political weight. One might be tempted to argue that the military potential is perhaps the single most important indicator of great power status. After all, many definitions of great power refer to its war capabilities. To Martin Wight ([1978](#): 18), a great power ‘can afford to incur a war’; in Georg Schwarzenberger’s view ([1964](#): 115), ‘the total warpower of a country is the ultimate test of its status in the international [hierarchy](#)’; and even Aron’s implicit benchmark is war: the ‘resources’ he has in mind are, above all, those susceptible to being transformed into weapons and troops. Yet the relevance of sheer military strength should not

be exaggerated: at the very least, there must be some connection between economic resources and military resources. It has often been noted, for example, that during the Cold War the Soviet Union – in many ways like Russia before it – was a ‘lopsided great power’ that compensated for its economic weakness with military might, discipline and a vast territory; eventually, the shaky economic foundations of the country played a large role in its sudden collapse. Austria in the early twentieth century and Japan in the 1930s could similarly rely on remarkable military forces, but their economic essentials could not sustain a large military effort; in fact, the very size of their military complex made their relative economic backwardness even more acute. By contrast, Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth century were able to work out a better combination of military and economic power; this, in turn, allowed them both to remain at the top of the international hierarchy for decades. In short, and as a general rule, ‘the better the symbiosis between the military and the economic arms of power ... the more likely would be the prolongation of a Great Power’s tenure’ (Kennedy [1994](#): 374).

While in times of war power is mostly a function of military might based on economic power, in times of peace power rests upon other elements as well, such as the ability to convince other nations by means short of the use of force. In [diplomatic](#) practice, it is often assumed that peacetime power and wartime power are somewhat related to each other. Many international agreements, for example, tend to reflect the relation of forces among the parties involved, as the weak are induced to accept the terms suggested by the strong. Yet calculating power, both in wartime and in peacetime, is a most difficult enterprise, and the net result is at best a vague approximation. Carl von Clausewitz ([1989 \[1832\]](#): 101) wrote memorable words in this vein: ‘War is the realm of chance ... Chance makes everything more uncertain and interferes with the whole course of events.’ Nor are things less complicated in time of peace. Aron ([1966](#): 62–70)

has persuasively shown how problematic it can be to select the economic indicators that will accurately measure the military potential of any given [nation](#). In addition, the number of people that can be mobilised in the war effort is above all a function of something that cannot be precisely gauged – that is, organisational and administrative skills. Finally, although we may easily anticipate that in a prolonged and costly conflict the war effort will be sustained only by reducing the standards of living of the civilian population, not even this is of great help in making predictions: rich countries would seem better equipped than poor countries to deal with a redefinition of such standards, but the former can find it more difficult to do without things that may well look superfluous to the latter.

## **The great powers in historical perspective**

Great powers can be found, almost by definition, in any historical age. Think, for example, of the famous rivalries of classical antiquity, such as Athens–Sparta and Rome–Carthage, or of the long period of Roman [hegemony](#) over most of Europe and the Mediterranean world. Although the Middle Ages witnessed in turn the fragmentation of Europe into a number of decentralised political entities that could hardly mobilise significant resources, nevertheless some hierarchy among them existed, and kingdoms, dynasties and city-states frequently struggled to rise above the rest. Despite all this, however, both historians and political scientists usually reserve the term ‘great power’ for the political units that have been active in the modern and contemporary state-system: solid, centralised states entertaining constant relations of all sorts. It is only when you have an established ‘system’ of states – that is, a set of political units that interact on a regular basis – that the role of the great powers can be appreciated

fully. Such conditions were historically met in the European continent at the beginning of the modern age (Kennedy [1987](#)). Although centres of power existed in Asia as well (Ming China, the Mogul Empire, Tokugawa Japan), it was in Europe that economic growth, military effectiveness and political organisation reached levels unmatched across the rest of the globe.

The evolution of the European state-system from its origins to its end – arguably in 1945 – can indeed be interpreted as a succession of struggles among great powers for expansion, influence and security. Periodically, a great power would rise to a position of predominance that seemed to jeopardise the independence, if not the survival, of the other great powers; the latter, in turn, would join forces in order to contain hegemony. Spain, France and Germany each twice tried to reach some form of control over most of the continent; each attempt was defeated, always by coalitions made up of those that refused to submit, in what remain the best historical illustrations of the [balance of power](#) (Dehio [1963 \[1948\]](#)).

From the beginning of the sixteenth century up to the Peace of [Westphalia](#) (1648), the policies of a dynastic and religious bloc, centred on Spain (and Austria) and led by the Habsburg rulers, were seen as aiming at a ‘universal monarchy’; accordingly, they prompted the opposition of other great powers – such as France and the Ottoman Empire – and of nations that became great powers precisely during that long struggle, such as the Netherlands and Sweden. But it was only in the following century that the European state-system acquired a more stable and more familiar physiognomy. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the decline of the Netherlands, Sweden and Spain was plain for all to see; next to the traditional great powers, France and Austria, now stood Russia, Britain and Prussia. It should be noted that rank had been lost or gained, kept or upgraded, thanks to a long series of wars. In a famous article published in 1833, the German historian Leopold von Ranke hailed the rise of the eighteenth-

century great powers as the safest barrier against France's hegemonic designs, as implemented first by Louis XIV and later by Napoleon (Ranke [1950 \[1833\]](#)) (see [Box 21.1](#)). To Ranke, the very existence of several great powers and their balance-of-power policies had performed the historical function of guaranteeing the freedom and particular development of all.

**Box 21.1:** Discussion points

**Ranke on the rise of the great powers in Europe**

As we have seen, it was a necessity of the seventeenth century that France be checked. This had now occurred in a manner that exceeded all expectation. It cannot really be said that an artificial, complex political system had been formed to this end. It merely appeared so, but the fact was that great powers had raised themselves by their own strength and that new independent national states in all their original power had taken over the world stage ... In their rise and development ... lies the principal event of the hundred years which preceded the outbreak of the French Revolution.

(Ranke [1950](#): 205–6)

Be that as it may, the five great powers that emerged in the eighteenth century would fight not only in the Napoleonic wars but – if you substitute Germany for Prussia – also in World War I and (with the exception of Austria) in World War II (Hinsley [1963](#): 4–5).

It was at Vienna in 1814 that the rank of great power was first recognised in diplomatic practice: in the words of the British Foreign Minister of the time, Castlereagh, the control of negotiations was to remain in the hands ‘of the six Powers most considerable in population and weight’ (quoted in Wight [1978](#): 19). The ‘Concert of Europe’ that followed, and that managed the international system until the outbreak of World War I, reflected a strategic equilibrium supported by the joint efforts of the great powers; neither the Crimean War nor the wars related to the national unification of Italy and Germany escalated to a continental conflict (see [Box 21.2](#)). Thanks to this relative stability and its industrial superiority, Britain reached its peak as a world power, in both naval and commercial terms, in the second half of the century. Shortly afterwards, however, the traditional Eurocentric international system was challenged by the spreading of industrialisation and modernisation to other areas of the world. While several economic indices pointed at a relative decline of France, Austria and Italy, the United States and Japan were now moving to the forefront; even Russia, despite its backwardness, was making considerable progress. Yet neither Soviet Russia nor the United States, for different reasons, played a significant role in the international system that resulted from World War I. Britain and France, while challenged by Italy, Germany and Japan, remained at the centre of the diplomatic stage. It took World War II for the two giants to finally emerge in what was to be a completely new configuration: a world system structured around two major powers, only one of which was (partially) European.

**Box 21.2:** Discussion points

**Different views on the great powers in the Concert of Europe**

Scholars disagree on the interpretation of the great powers’ policies during the Concert of Europe.

The impressive thing about the behavior of the Powers in 1815 is that they were prepared, as they had never previously been prepared, to waive their individual interests in the pursuit of an international system.

(Hinsley [1963](#): 197)

The success of the Concert ... was the result rather than the cause of this pacification, which was primarily due to the fact that Britain, Russia and France had at that time apparently limitless opportunities of independent expansion outside Europe, while Prussia was busy conquering Germany.

(Wight [1978](#): 22)

Size, population, military might, economic strength, political organisation – for most of the Cold War period, the two [superpowers](#) were unmatched by any combination of those indicators. Their military superiority, in particular, was further reinforced by their massive build-up of nuclear weapons. Although the diplomatic and strategic landscape of the second half of the twentieth century was thus totally different from that of the previous decades (let alone centuries), some familiar traits of international politics persisted: each superpower had its own [sphere of influence](#); each kept the other in check, in some revisited form of balance of power; and [bilateral](#) agreements on certain issues would exert a strong, persuasive pressure on all the other nations, just as bilateral crises would threaten to involve allies in a general war. Simply put, the international agenda

was shaped by the policies of, and the relations between, the two great powers – possibly to an extent unmatched before: they were both global powers, with global interests and the appropriate means – ideological, diplomatic, economic and military – to pursue such interests.

The progressive reduction in the number of the great powers reached a new stage with the end of the Cold War. Since the early 1990s, the United States has been the only superpower. Before we examine the post-Cold War international system, however, let us take a look at some of the most relevant theories of IR that are centred on the great powers.

## **The great powers in the theory of International Relations**

Although there is no such thing as a comprehensive ‘great powers theory’, in their analysis of several important issues, scholars have always devoted a good deal of attention to the great powers. For our purposes, at least two main themes must be mentioned.

### **The great powers and international order**

Arguably the most relevant function performed by the great powers is related to the creation and preservation of some international order. According to Hedley Bull ([1977](#): 200–29), great powers claim, and are usually granted, special rights and responsibilities in managing issues of [security](#) and stability. They can carry out such a function in two basic ways: by handling their relations with one another and by exploiting their superiority *vis-à-vis* the other nations. The great powers are the main actors behind the implementation of the balance of power: when relations with each other become tense, they can engage in measures of

crisis prevention and management. Finally, if a war does break out, they can try to limit its escalation. As for the exercise of preponderance over weaker nations, this can take various forms, ranging from the establishment of some outright dominance to hegemony or to milder techniques of control, such as spheres of influence. In short, the great powers restrain the policies of the other nations and prevent them from taking unsettling initiatives. While those measures of coercion and persuasion are likely to impose a cost on the weak, they also strengthen the stability of the international system as a whole. The Concert of Europe offers a nice illustration of all this: the great powers, after finding a collective *modus vivendi*, moved on to promote joint policies that affected the entire international system (Clark [1989](#): 170).

Similarly, during the Cold War, the two superpowers kept each other in check, and also managed their respective spheres of influence and – albeit sporadically – enforced common policies (e.g. nuclear non-proliferation) (Gaddis [1986](#)).

If management is a key function, what are the conditions that make it more or less likely? One influential answer suggests to look at the *number* of great powers. Ever since the beginning of the Cold War, scholars have compared and contrasted two basic types of international system: the [multipolar](#) system – the historical reference for which was, of course, the classical European state-system – and the bipolar system that emerged from World War II. At first, the former was considered more reliable. When several great powers existed, so the argument went, they could always adjust to changes in the relation of forces. If one of them grew too powerful, its partners could leave the [alliance](#) and create a new coalition, according to classical balance-of-power principles. Multipolar systems are based on *flexible alliances* because when there are more than two significant players, realignment is, by definition, always an option. This is why multipolarity may seem better equipped than bipolarity to absorb shocks related

to shifts in the distribution of capabilities among the main actors (Morgenthau [1973 \[1948\]](#): 349–50). The opposite view, the most outspoken supporter of which has been Kenneth Waltz ([1979](#): 163–70), argues that in multipolar systems friendships and rivalries are often ambiguous; in addition, it is frequently uncertain who will take the leadership in a time of need. Such a systemic complexity predisposes the great powers to make two serious mistakes: they may tie themselves too tightly to some adventurous ally whose support is considered vital (*chain-ganging*); or they may be encouraged to behave as free riders, hoping that somebody else will pull the chestnuts out of the fire (*buck-passing*). The crisis leading to the outbreak of World War I illustrates the first mechanism, while the general failure to prevent Germany from becoming more and more aggressive in the late 1930s is an example of the second.

By contrast, a bipolar system is not afflicted with such problems. Here, who is a friend to whom – just as who is a foe to whom – is well known. It is clear who will take responsibility for managing the system: the ‘Big Two’ will. Waltz acknowledges that in multipolarity, alliances are flexible. But he adds that such a flexibility can induce the great powers to adopt rigid strategies in times of crisis. On the contrary, while bipolarity is characterised by rigid alliances, this allows the Big Two to adopt flexible strategies. What does this mean? Take a multipolar crisis, such as the one that struck Europe in the summer of 1914. Precisely because it could not afford the luxury of losing its only reliable ally, Germany – far from restraining Austria – actually encouraged Vienna’s bellicose posture and ended up tying its own hands, which contributed to the collective loss of control over events. Take now the 1956 Suez crisis in a bipolar context. In this case, the United States knew that its own allies had no credible realignment option; in addition, even if they had defected, this would not have altered the overall strategic balance, because the power gap between the Big Two and all the others was simply too wide. These systemic conditions allowed the United

States to restrain France, Britain and Israel, and the crisis was over in a matter of days.

### **The great powers and international change**

Although great powers are always there, their identity varies across history. Some keep their rank for quite some time, while others go through a much faster cycle. Yet all great powers rise and fall. In this simple fact lies the key to understanding two fundamental phenomena of international politics: systemic change and the origin of major wars.

Drawing upon Thucydides' ([1972](#) [c. 431 BC]: 48–9, 87, 103) diagnosis of the causes of the Peloponnesian war and some general insights on the evolution of universal history (Toynbee [1934](#), [1939](#)), a number of contemporary scholars have explained international change as the reflection of a fundamental shift in the relation of forces among the great powers, including 'power transition theory' (Organski and Kugler [1980](#)), 'power cycle theory' (Doran [1971](#), 1991), 'hegemonic war theory' (Gilpin [1981](#), [1988](#)) and 'long cycle theory' (Modelski [1987](#)). Although those frameworks differ in many respects, they all share the basic idea that patterns of *relative growth* and *relative decline* between the great powers decisively affect the dynamics of international politics. According to Paul Kennedy ([1994](#)), the differential in terms of economic and technological development among nations predisposes the strong and rich to expand their political influence with the help of military means, either by establishing veritable empires (as Spain, Britain and France did at their zenith) or by getting rid of dangerous rivals (as the United States did in the twentieth century). Such predominance, however, is sooner or later challenged by those powers that are now rising and filling the initial gap. While the dominant power may still be growing in absolute terms, other powers are growing even faster – which means

that the dominant power has now entered a phase of relative decline. Such was the position, for example, in which the Netherlands and France found themselves in the mid-eighteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century respectively. At this point, the declining great power is likely to have all sorts of obligations (dependence on foreign markets and raw materials, overseas military bases, alliances) and less means to deal with them. Its instinctive response to the rise of challengers is usually to spend more on defence, thereby diverting resources from productive investment and further accelerating its own decline. The cases of imperial Spain in the seventeenth century, of Britain on the eve of World War I and of the Soviet Union in the last phase of the Cold War illustrate the point.

Although Kennedy emphasises the mismatch between economic potential and military spending, neither he nor other scholars who write in a similar vein argue that economic variables alone are always decisive. As we have seen, ‘power’ is a multidimensional concept – space and domestic organisation play just as important a role. Robert Gilpin ([1981](#): 186–97) argues that a declining great power has two broad strategies at its disposal: it can try to increase its resources, or attempt to reduce its costs. Accordingly, not only can it extract some tribute from its clients or manipulate the terms of trade with other countries; it can also try to increase its own efficiency via social and institutional reform. On the cost-reduction side, the declining great power can design a new defensive perimeter with the help of new alliances, can make concessions to the challenger or can withdraw [unilaterally](#) from the most exposed areas.

Although great powers such as Venice or China were able to slow down their decline for centuries, thanks to a skilful use of their resources, in other cases the shifting distribution of power between the main players has ended up in a ‘hegemonic war’ characterised by: (1) a direct clash between the former dominant power and the rising challenger; (2) the use of unlimited means; and

(3) the general scope of warfare. In other words, this type of war is different from other armed conflicts because the governance of the international system is at stake. In the modern age, the Thirty Years' War (1618–48), the Napoleonic Wars and the two World Wars illustrate the point: in each case, what followed was a new international system, with a new distribution of territory, new political and economic arrangements and a new hierarchy between the great powers (Gilpin [1988](#)).

### **Rising powers and transformations in the international order**

**Tom Chodor**

One of the most significant developments in world politics in recent years has been the emergence of 'rising powers' from the global South – countries such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the BRICS), and others such as Indonesia, South Korea and Turkey – which have increasingly become leading players in the international system. They have emerged as powers because of their growing centrality in the global economy, itself part of a larger historical shift of economic power from its established centres in the global North to the global South. In the era of neoliberal globalisation, the largest developing nations have become more integrated with global markets and more economically powerful, while the dominant position of the established powers has diminished.

Between 1990 and 2012, the share of global GDP attributed to the G7 nations (the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Japan and Italy) declined from 65 to 47 per cent, while the share of emerging economies grew from 20 to 38 per cent, with China in particular surging to become the world's second largest economy, poised

to overtake the United States in the near future (Armijo and Echeverri-Gent [2014](#): 144). The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 demonstrated even more clearly the significance of the global South. With the developed world mired in stagnation almost a decade on from the crisis, it has been the ‘locomotives from the South’ that have powered global growth, with the BRICS accounting for over 50 per cent of global GDP growth since 2009 and their share of global exports increasing to 20 per cent by 2012, while the BRIICS (BRICS plus Indonesia) doubled their share of global imports to 18 per cent between 2000 and 2012, and have also become important sources of foreign direct investment, increasing their global share from a paltry 1 per cent to 10 per cent during that period (Cooper and Thakur [2013](#): 11; OECD [2014](#): 26). Even if growth in some of the rising powers has slowed in recent times, they remain the best hope for continuing prosperity in the global economy in the coming century, leading the US National Intelligence Council to announce in 2012 that ‘the diffusion of power among countries ... will have a dramatic impact by 2030, largely reversing the historic rise of the West since 1750 and restoring Asia’s weight in the global economy and world politics’ and to conclude that ‘the “unipolar moment” is over and [Pax Americana](#) ... is fast winding down’ (USNIC [2012](#): 15, 98).

Unsurprisingly, the rising powers increasingly have sought to translate this growing economic clout into greater influence in the international order, whether in the demands of the BRICS to increase their voting rights at the IMF and World Bank, or Brazil and India’s push for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Complicating matters is the fact that, for the first time in the history of the modern international system, the rising powers come from a non-Western, often post-colonial background, bringing with them different historical, cultural, political

and economic perspectives to those of the established powers. This has sparked debates about the extent to which the rising powers will challenge the current international order.

In these debates, realist scholars have been most pessimistic, arguing that we are witnessing a power transition under which the emerging powers will attempt to overturn the status quo, if necessary through violent means. The obvious focus here has been on China, as the clearest potential 'hegemonic' challenger to the United States, with scholars such as Mearsheimer ([2010](#)) arguing that conflict between the two is inevitable as China's power grows and that of the United States declines. China's recent militarisation of the South China Sea, and its growing influence in other parts of the South, from Africa to Latin America, have served to reinforce fears of a looming conflict between the two pretenders to global dominance. Such pessimism has been countered by liberals and constructivists, who argue that China and the other rising powers are already being socialised into becoming 'responsible stakeholders' in the current system. Scholars such as Ikenberry ([2011](#)) have argued that the current international order is 'easy to join and hard to overturn', offering multiple incentives for rising powers to accept its norms – especially given the fact that their prosperity relies on integration with global markets. Encouraged by the rising powers' enthusiasm for participation in global institutions, Ikenberry ([2011](#): 57) concludes that 'today's power transition represents not the defeat of the liberal order but its ultimate ascendance'.

The reality of the situation is slightly more complicated. While there is no doubt that the rising powers have relied on integration with global markets for their growing prosperity, they have done so through political and economic models that are often at odds with the (neo)liberal

consensus promoted by the established powers. In particular, their economies and societies are much more 'statist', having relied on the state to drive the development process, often at the cost of individual freedoms championed – though often selectively – by the global North. A more accurate description is provided by Stephen (2014), who argues that the rising powers pose a 'within-system challenge' to the current international order: challenging its most liberal content while engaging with its existing institutional structures. This is because neoliberal globalisation has not only made autarky an unviable development strategy, but also linked national power to the ability to capture market share, rather than control over territory. In such a context, great powers rely on global forums to govern issues that would otherwise be beyond their reach, creating strong incentives to work through the existing structures of global governance. At the same time, however, their 'statist' background is at odds with the current character of global governance, leading to contestation over its most liberal aspects – for example, over the correct amount of state intervention in the pursuit of development, or over issues such as humanitarian intervention and liberal conceptions of human rights. In short, the current international order is characterised neither by a wholesale challenge by the rising powers nor their complete accommodation with it, but rather by growing multipolarity, with a growing diversity of interests and perspectives competing to define its parameters.

In itself, such diversity does not have to lead to conflict or disorder. Indeed, as Dunne and Reus-Smit (2017) have shown, the international order has always been characterised by diversity, and a crucial aspect of its success or failure was the ability to manage this diversity. Whether the current order is up to this challenge remains to be seen, but recent

developments have raised some doubts. The most important among these is the response of the United States to a more multipolar world. After initially engaging the rising powers as ‘responsible stakeholders,’ the United States has increasingly come to see them as a threat to its power and influence, with their success not representing the triumph of globalisation, but rather stemming from an unfair manipulation of the rules of the game – an attitude that seems likely to only intensify under a Trump administration (Chodor [2017](#)). This has translated into growing US obstructionism of rising power demands within the international system – for example, in the long delay of the ratification of IMF voting reforms, or outright opposition to the establishment of the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). In response, the rising powers have increasingly sought to establish their own institutions, with the BRICS most active in this regard, setting up a development bank and monetary fund in 2014, leading to fears of the fragmentation of the international order into competing blocs and spheres of influence. Whether such fragmentation will increase tensions, and whether this growing diversity can be managed, will depend on the choices of key actors in world politics, making this a very exciting – if potentially fraught – period to be studying IR.

## **The great powers after the Cold War**

Do ‘hegemonic wars’ as a repetitive phenomenon rule out peaceful change? Of course not. What we witnessed between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was precisely the peaceful resolution of a long great-power

competition and a smooth transition to a new international system. Does all this affect the relevance of what we have discussed so far? Not really, for at least two reasons. First, the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union vividly reminds us of the multidimensional nature of power. The Soviet Union was a formidable military power – too formidable, in fact, to be sustained by the economic means at its disposal. In addition, the Soviet political system was no longer able to mobilise any significant support among its citizens at home and its allies abroad. Except for its military might, in other words, the Soviet Union could no longer be considered a credible challenger to the United States. The peaceful end of the Cold War is thus less surprising than it might seem, for the typical preconditions for a ‘hegemonic war’ simply failed to materialise.

Second, a great-power analysis along traditional lines can still shed some light on several basic features of the current international system. To that purpose, [Table 21.1](#) compares the contemporary major powers on the basis of a few indicators. While the overall picture is far from being exhaustive, it nevertheless suggests some significant considerations.

**Table 21.1** The great powers in 2015

	<b>United States</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>EU-28</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>Japan</b>
Population (millions)	321.5	146	538	66.6	82.1	64.8	1268
Size (million km <sup>2</sup> )	9.3	17	4.3	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.4
GDP (trillion \$)	17.9	1.3	162	2.4	3.3	2.8	4.1

Growth rate (%)	2.4	-3.7	2.2	1.2	1.7	2.3	0.5
Defence outlays (billion \$)	595	66	279	61	47	60	43

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Sources: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com>, Eurostat, IMF, World Bank, SIPRI.

In military terms, the United States is in a class of its own. No other country comes even close to matching the amount of money that it allocates to defence. The United States is a distant first in terms of GDP too. If these two gross indicators are combined, one can indeed find some compelling evidence for this rare power configuration called ‘unipolarity’: an international system structured around one major power only. This configuration is so unusual that many scholars have felt the need to develop new criteria to classify the great powers and shed light on their relations. Accordingly, some see significant dynamics at play between the superpower, the major regional powers (China, the European Union, Russia, Brazil, India, Iran) and the secondary regional powers (Huntington [1999](#)); others differentiate between the superpowers – those nations that, in light of their global role, are entitled to great power rank (China, Russia, Japan and the European Union) – and a host of regional powers that, unlike the great powers, are not equipped to project their influence far beyond their borders (Buzan [2004](#)).

[Table 21.1](#) also points at the potential of the European Union as a great power. As independent players, even the three most important European nations are no more than pygmies; however, a politically cohesive European Union – something like the ‘United States of Europe’ – would be a natural candidate for

great power status and role. More importantly, [Table 21.1](#) shows some trends that, if confirmed in the future, might have significant repercussions. If we look at growth rates, we cannot help noting the impetuous rise of China and India, which makes for a strident contrast with the more modest pace at which the United States and the European Union are growing. While it is too soon to say whether this is the beginning of a new ‘power transition’, it is important to keep in mind that large economic shifts have in the past very often preceded the rise of new great powers.

[Table 21.1](#) also reminds us that great power status still rests upon a number of attributes. Since the end of the Cold War, many have been concerned about nuclear proliferation. Whether the spread of nuclear weapons would have stabilising or destabilising consequences is open to debate. For our purposes, it is enough to say that nuclear weapons alone do not transform nations into great powers. During the Cold War, Britain and France were not great powers, despite their strategic arsenals (Morgenthau [1972](#)). After the Cold War, Pakistan and North Korea did not become great powers following their first nuclear tests. In purely defensive postures, however, nuclear weapons may have altered the connection between economic means and military might: if a minor power adopts a strategy based on nuclear [deterrence](#), it can easily complicate whatever plans of intimidation a bigger power might have, its modest economic capability notwithstanding (Waltz [1993](#)). Another recurrent theme is that in the contemporary international system power has become more diffused; as a result, the importance of non-material resources – including culture, ideology and institutionalised [norms](#) – has been enhanced. Such ingredients make for what is called ‘[soft power](#)’ (Nye [1990](#)), and the United States is usually believed to have more of it than other countries. One may wonder, however, whether this is a feature only of contemporary world politics. In the past as well, a great power’s culture and ideology have attracted other nations and conferred legitimacy on the

former's policies. In addition, 'soft power' is influential insofar as it is connected with 'hard power'. The spread of cultural models throughout the ancient world was certainly an integral part of Roman hegemony; however, such a hegemony was in the first place based upon material resources and organisation. Likewise, at its peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France exerted a remarkable 'soft power' over the other European nations, as it set the standards for literature, language and arts. But France was above all a rich, centralised, very populous, well-armed, big country. Finally, just as for 'hard power', it is difficult to measure the impact of 'soft power': while American cultural models (e.g. Hollywood movies) may reinforce the influence of the United States, they may also unleash bitter anti-American reactions (Kennedy [1994](#): 375).



**Figure 21.1** US President Obama in discussion aboard *Air Force One*, June 2009

**Great power rivalry and the return of power politics in Asia**  
**Andrew Phillips**

Great power rivalry is back. For the first decade of the post-Cold War era, optimists had assumed great power rivalry to be a thing of the past, made redundant by US unipolarity and the pacifying consequences of economic globalisation. Later, following the 9/11 attacks, commentators opined just as confidently that the global security environment was being transformed, with violent non-state actors replacing great power rivalry as the most urgent challenge to international peace and security.

Fast-forward fifteen years, and while the threat of transnational terrorism has by no means receded, policy-makers and academics alike have been forced to acknowledge the resurgent centrality of great power rivalry in world politics. This trend is apparent everywhere, but has proved particularly acute in Asia – a region that was until recently the principal beneficiary of a surge in transnational economic interdependence underwritten by US military dominance.

Four key trends are currently transforming the Asian security environment, and priming it as the epicentre of renewed great power rivalry in the twenty-first century:

**1 A more crowded Asia:** The most important trend currently reshaping Asia is its accelerating return to multipolarity. Following the 1972 Shanghai communiqué between the United States and China, and the subsequent normalisation of bilateral ties between those two countries, the region enjoyed a prolonged period of strategic stability, based on the common alignment of Northeast Asia's key players – China, Japan and the United States. This happy condominium of Great Power interests has now frayed, giving way to a ripening United States–China rivalry. Japanese security anxieties have meanwhile seen it partly abandon its post-World War II commitment to pacifism, in favour of a real (though

tentative) move towards rearmament to hedge against a rising China. Alongside these developments, the incipient rise of other Great Powers (India and potentially also Indonesia) has further complicated the strategic landscape, as the stability of a US-dominated regional security order gives way to a more volatile multipolar Asia.

**2 A more contested Asia:** Alongside a return to multipolarity, Asia today is also witnessing increasingly overt and militarised struggles for power. Most conspicuously, in maritime East Asia China has abandoned its earlier policy of ‘peaceful rise’ and regional reassurance, instead favouring a more assertive use of its growing military power to defend its interests. This trend has been clearest in the South China Sea, where China has employed local military preponderance to assert sovereign control over much of the region, at the expense of weaker powers such as the Philippines and Vietnam. Simultaneously, China has focused its military modernisation efforts on developing Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities. These capabilities – already well-developed – aim to impose unacceptable costs on US efforts to oppose China as it consolidates control throughout its immediate maritime periphery. Previously, US military dominance assured strategic stability in the Western Pacific. But Chinese military modernisation is now dangerously corroding this dominance, potentially portending renewed great power armed conflict.

**3 A more connected Asia:** Asia’s strategic landscape is becoming not only more crowded and contested, but also more expansive, as a web of economic and geopolitical interconnections increasingly integrate its respective East Asian, Indian Ocean and Central Asian sub-regions. China’s signature international order-building effort – the One Belt, One

Road (OBOR) initiative – seeks to catalyse a Pan-Asian connectivity revolution, knitting its peoples together through a seamless web of land-based and maritime infrastructure mega-projects. Concurrent with the OBOR initiative, other Asian powers are also expanding and diversifying their economic and security partnerships in ways that may anticipate a revolution in Asia's strategic geography, from an Asia-Pacific to an Indo-Pacific orientation. In particular, reflecting their shared wariness of China, Japan, India and Australia have sought to upgrade bilateral and security cooperation, particularly in the maritime domain. For now, these partnerships remain tentative and incomplete, but in conjunction with China's westward expansion, they underscore a nascent supersizing of Asia's strategic geography, as partnerships and rivalries formerly confined to East Asia play out on a Pan-Asian scale.

**4 A more uncertain Asia:** Amplifying all of the aforementioned trends is the vast growth of strategic uncertainty in Asia concerning the continued willingness and capacity of the United States to serve as the region's primary security guarantor. Notwithstanding its much vaunted 'pivot', Washington largely failed to follow through on its rhetorical commitment to rebalance its military posture towards the Asia-Pacific under the Obama Administration. Donald Trump's shock election as President of the United States further unsettled the region, given Trump's avowed scepticism towards the value of US alliances, and his relaxed attitude at the prospect of Japan and South Korea acquiring their own independent nuclear deterrents. The protectionist sentiment unleashed by the 2016 presidential election has meanwhile further corroded confidence in the ongoing commitment of the United States to defend an open regional economic order. No region in the post-Cold War world has

been more dependent than Asia on the willingness of the United States to use its military power to uphold strategic stability, and no region has benefited more than Asia from the willingness of the United States to fuel global growth by serving as ‘consumer of last resort’, and by spearheading regional and global economic liberalisation.

Correspondingly, as a more polarised United States beckons, Asia will likely bear the disproportionate brunt of US introversion, as the US-centred regional order gives way to a more unpredictable and more contested successor. In stark defiance of hopes that the post-Cold War world would see an end to power politics, great power rivalry has most assuredly returned to Asia.

## Conclusion

One of the historical functions of the great powers has been the management of the international system: it is only when the most relevant players concur that collective action can be taken. To a large extent, this is still true. The blooming of international institutions over the past decades has led many to conclude that states are no longer the only relevant actors in world politics. Yet the functioning of the main international organisations essentially depends on the preferences of the great powers. Both during and after the Cold War, security issues have been addressed successfully by the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) only when the five permanent members of the Security Council have agreed. [NATO](#)’s profile has always been shaped by US policies, just as the European integration process has always reflected – and keeps reflecting – French and German priorities and

leadership. This is apart from those international fora whose membership is officially restricted to the strong, such as the [G20](#), the self-appointed, exclusive association of the largest economies in the world. At the same time, there are also significant discontinuities. In the past, great powers have often balanced each other, thus preventing one of them from growing too strong; yet since the end of the Cold War no balance of power has emerged to contain the United States. This may be due to a number of factors: unlike many previous hegemonic great powers, the United States is not interested in territorial expansion; it is a democracy, and it accepts some self-restraint, as reflected in its participation in a number of international institutions (Ikenberry [2002](#)). Thus, although a formidable great power, the United States does not pose a threat to other nations. There are, however, more familiar explanations that cannot be neglected. First, in structural terms, the power gap between the United States and the other nations may simply be too wide to be filled by any coalition. Second, since the Cold War, US diplomacy has been very good at preserving (in Western Europe, the Far East, the Middle East) and expanding (in Eastern Europe and in Central Asia) its network of alliances on a global scale while keeping strong regional actors (e.g. Russia, China, Iraq and Iran) at bay (Huntington [1999](#); Joffe [1995](#)). Such a policy places the United States in continuity with what great powers have traditionally done to defend and enlarge their spheres of influence.

## Discussion questions

**21.1** Geography – or what Raymond Aron calls *milieu* – has often played a large role in defining great-power status. What is its role in the contemporary international system?

**21.2** Under what conditions might India and China emerge as great powers in the next two decades or so? Will this affect the tone and content of their relations with the United States?

**21.3** Why does realism assign a special place to the great powers?

**21.4** What are the functions performed by the great powers in the United Nations? Are those functions significantly different from those carried out by the great powers prior to the existence of the United Nations?

**21.5** Discuss how Hedley Bull's ideas about great-power politics can be illustrated in a past international system of your choosing.

### *Further reading*

Grygiel, Jakub J. 2006, *Great powers and geopolitical change*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. *Sheds light on the importance of geopolitical variables (stability of state boundaries, location of resources, trade networks) in establishing and keeping power in the international arena. Case studies include Venice, the Ottoman Empire and China in the fifteenth century.*

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Holbraad, Carsten 1970, *The concert of Europe: A study in German and British international theory, 1815–1914*, London: Longman. *Discusses how British, Austrian and German statesmen and intellectuals alike looked at the Concert of Europe in different periods of the nineteenth century, and shows the ambivalent connections between the Concert and the old balance of power.*

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Joffe, Josef 1998, *The great powers*, London: Phoenix. *Examines the post-Cold War international system and the role of the great powers therein. Analysis is combined with the major theoretical paradigms of the field for explanatory and predictive purposes.*

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Mearsheimer, John J. 2001, *The tragedy of great power politics*, New York: W.W. Norton. *Offers a general realist theory about the behaviour of the great powers, with special emphasis on war. Illustrations range from the eighteenth century to the present.*

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Pastor, Robert A. and Hoffmann, Stanley H. (eds) 1999, *A century's journey: How the great powers shape the world*, New York: Basic Books. *Looks at the continuities and discontinuities in the grand strategy and foreign policy of the United States, Japan, China, Russia and the major European powers over the course of the twentieth century.*

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Rasler, Karen A. and Thompson, William R. 1994, *The great powers and global struggle, 1490–1990*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky. *Focuses on the rise and fall of the great powers, and the way in which these shifts have set the stage for the outbreak of major wars over the past five centuries.*

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Thompson, William R. and Rapkin, David P. 2013, *Transition scenarios: China and the United States in the twenty-first century*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *Assesses the relevance of power transition theories for current and future United States–China relations.*

## Part 4



# The new agenda

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# The United Nations



**Ian Hurd**

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## Introduction

This chapter explains the legal and political features of the [United Nations](#). It begins with a short introduction to the [UN Charter](#) in [international law](#), which shows the framework, limits and authorities within which all UN activity takes place. It then puts these into a more practical setting, emphasising how the organisation can be seen as at once an actor, as a forum and as a resource (or some combination of all three).

The UN Charter has near-constitutional status in the interstate system. It defines acceptable conduct for governments in their international affairs and has the capacity to make these mandatory. As a result, the international system has had a fundamentally different governance structure since 1945 than before. The Charter first defines the essential obligations that governments owe to one another, which include strict regulation of the use of force to settle disputes, the aspirations to universal [human rights](#) and gender equality, and the subordination of [states](#) to the collective decisions of the UN Security Council. Second, it creates a set of formal institutions – the organs of the United Nations – with specific competencies to oversee those obligations. These institutions, which include the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Trusteeship Council, have their own [powers](#), limits and practices, and therefore their own legal and political lives. Since its [ratification](#) in 1945, the Charter has been the centrepiece of international law among states, setting the post-1945 era apart from anything that came before. The organisation has come to include all [sovereign states](#) in the world, or at least all states that are widely recognised as being states (where who counts as a ‘state’ is largely endogenous – that is, defined by who the United Nations is willing to accept as a member), so its rules and powers have come to make up the constitutional structure for interstate relations. International politics today takes place inside this legal and institutional framework, and also around it, as states and others fight over what it means, how it should be applied and how it might be used, changed or evaded.



**Figure 22.1** The United Nations Headquarters in Geneva

The breadth and authority of the United Nations mean that its decisions and its peculiarities matter a great deal for world politics. At the same time, an intriguing gap exists between the formal powers of the United Nations and its life in practice. It is therefore worth examining both the legal terms set out in the Charter and the interaction between the Charter and the real-world practices that arise around it.

## **The United Nations in the Charter**

The UN Charter is the international treaty that states sign to become members of the United Nations organisation. The fact that it is an interstate treaty means that the organisation that follows from it is [state-centric](#) as well: it has formal authority over states only and not individuals, firms, or other groups. The Charter was negotiated in 1945 among the fifty or so countries that participated in the San Francisco conference as World War II was ending, and it was conceived as a formal foundation for the new international organisation and also

as a place to express what were thought of as universal values and goals in need of reinforcement after the traumas of the first half of the twentieth century. It therefore contains two kinds of clauses: those that affirm values and goals in aspirational terms; and those that express formal legal content. The former are exemplified by the Preamble, which says among other things that, ‘We the Peoples of the United Nations [are] determined ... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors’ and pledge to ‘employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples’. The latter are much less poetic (for example, Article 29 says ‘The Security Council may establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions’) but they set the legal framework within which much of international politics takes place. They spell out the commitments that states make to each other and to the organisation as a consequence of joining the United Nations, and they define the organs of the United Nations and their various powers and limits. This section explores the three main areas in which membership of the United Nations creates specific legal constraints or obligations on states.

The main obligations that arise from membership in the United Nations are as follows: to pay one’s financial contribution to the organisation (Art. 17(2)); to support the decisions of the UN Security Council (Art. 25); and to refrain from using force to settle disputes with other states (Art. 2(4)). These are commitments that are binding on every individual state that is a member of the United Nations. They constitute only a small proportion of the entire Charter, but they have an enormous influence over the content and direction of international relations. Some UN organs (notably the Security Council) can create additional obligations by taking a decision to that effect, but these remain encapsulated within the core powers from which they derive. For instance, the Security Council decided in 2001 (Resolution 1343) that no country should import rough

diamonds from Liberia on the belief that the revenue of the diamond trade was funding the Liberian leader's support of [war](#) and atrocity in west Africa, and this automatically became a mandatory obligation for UN members as a result of the language of Article 25 (and further of Chapter VII) of the Charter.

The United Nations itself is delimited by two very important clauses in Article 2 of the Charter. The first says that 'The Organization is based on the sovereign equality of all its Members' (Art. 2(1)), and the second that 'Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state' (Art. 2(7)). These create both an internal and an external limit on all UN activities. Internally, Article 2(1) requires that everything that happens in the organisation must treat all members equally. All members have the same rights and duties under law, no matter how powerful or weak they may be. The United Nations cannot behave in any way that favours one group of members over any others. Externally, Article 2(7) establishes that the United Nations has no authority over states' domestic affairs, and everything it does in the wider world must either deal with the *international* rather than domestic affairs of states, or be done with the permission of the state with which it is dealing. These are strict and serious limits on the power of the United Nations – although both are subject to ambiguities in their interpretation, which make for some interesting and unexpected developments. For instance, the key to understanding Article 2(7) is understanding the term 'essentially within the domestic jurisdiction' of a state – and this language is not explained further anywhere in the Charter. It is open to interpretation, and is frequently argued over. It is often understood as the obverse of a 'threat to international [peace](#) and [security](#)' from Article 39, which leads to the following equation: any issue that threatens international peace and security is by definition not within the domestic jurisdiction of the state, and so anything the Council does with respect to international security is *ipso facto* not

a violation of the domestic sovereignty of any state. Putting these two clauses together means that when the Security Council decides that a matter is a threat to international peace, the restrictions on intervention contained in Article 2(7) are not relevant to the case. So, when the Council decided in 2006 that North Korea's nuclear weapons program constituted a threat to international peace and security (Res. 1718), North Korea could no longer claim that it had the right under international law to develop these weapons for its own defence. Similarly, Sudan could not maintain that the atrocities in Darfur constituted a matter within its domestic jurisdiction following the decision of the Council in 2004 (Res. 1564) that identified them as a problem of international peace and security.

## **The principal organs of the United Nations**

The Charter defines the central institutions (the 'principal organs') of the United Nations as the General Assembly (GA), the Security Council (SC), the UN Secretariat, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Trusteeship Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The last three of these are much less significant than the first three and I treat them briefly here before turning to the GA, the SC and the Secretariat.

The ECOSOC (see [Box 22.1](#)) is best seen as a subsidiary organ to the General Assembly, and so fits into the discussion of the GA below. The ICJ (see [Box 22.2](#)) hears cases that arise from legal disputes between states and it issues binding decisions in response. The court is set out in the UN Charter, but it is governed largely by the separate Statute of the ICJ and its docket of contentious cases is entirely separate from the United Nations.

### **Box 22.1: Key texts**

## **UN Charter: ECOSOC**

### **Article 61**

**1** The Economic and Social Council shall consist of fifty-four Members of the United Nations elected by the General Assembly.

### **Article 62**

**1** The Economic and Social Council may make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters and may make recommendations ... to the General Assembly, to the Members of the United Nations, and to the specialized agencies concerned.

**2** It may make recommendations for the purposes of promoting respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

### **Article 67**

**1** Each member of the Economic and Social Council shall have one vote.

**2** Decisions of the Economic and Social Council shall be made by a majority of the members present and voting.

## **Box 22.2: Key texts**

### **UN Charter: The International Court of Justice**

### **Article 92**

The International Court of Justice shall be the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

### **Article 93**

**1** All Members of the United Nations are *ipso facto* parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.

### **Article 94**

**1** Each member of the United Nations undertakes to comply with the decision of the International Court of Justice to which it is a party.

The Trusteeship Council (see [Box 22.3](#)) was once the legal overseer of territories governed by other states as mandates or in trusteeship, and it was responsible for ensuring that this near-colonial relationship did not degenerate into outright [colonialism](#). The system came to an end when Palau, the last of the trust territories, declared independence and was recognised as a sovereign state in 1994. The Trusteeship Council is therefore dead in practice, though it remains alive in law given that its permanence is written into the Charter; it still has members, still chooses its president and vice-president, and until 2005 it still held annual meetings that were without content.

### **Box 22.3: Key texts**

#### **UN Charter: The Trusteeship Council**

### **Article 75**

The United Nations shall establish ... an international trusteeship system for the administration and supervision of such territories as may be placed thereunder by subsequent agreements.

#### **Article 77**

- 1** The trusteeship system shall apply to ...
  - a** territories now held under mandate;
  - b** territories which may be detached from enemy states as a result of the Second World War; and
  - c** territories voluntarily placed under the system by states responsible for their administration.

#### **Article 87**

The General Assembly and, under its authority, the Trusteeship Council, ... may:

- a** consider reports submitted by the administering authority; ...
- b** provide for periodic visits to the respective trust territories ...; and
- c** take these and other actions in conformity with the terms of the trusteeship agreements.

The core of the UN mission is performed by the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretariat. The division of authority among them

establishes that the Council has the authority to take decisions regarding international peace and security on behalf of all UN members ([Box 22.4](#)), the General Assembly may make recommendations to members on any topic within the scope of the Charter ([Box 22.6](#)), and the Secretariat supplies the administrative support to make these two function ([Box 22.7](#)).

#### **Box 22.4: Key texts**

##### **UN Charter: The Security Council**

###### **Article 23**

**1** The Security Council shall consist of fifteen Members of the United Nations. The Republic of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom ... and the United States of America shall be permanent members of the Security Council. The General Assembly shall elect ten other Members.

###### **Article 24**

**1** In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

###### **Article 27**

**1** Each member of the Security Council shall have one vote ...

**2** Decisions of the Security Council ... shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the

concurring votes of the permanent members.

### **Article 39**

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall ... decide what measures shall be taken ... to restore international peace and security.

This distribution of powers reflects the interests of the [great powers](#) in 1945: the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom wanted a centralised enforcement vehicle that would represent the entire UN membership and a forum for global debate that could encompass the broad range of that membership. These two functions had to be institutionally separate because they reflected contradictory impulses of domination and participation. The great powers (see [Chapter 21](#)) wanted to ensure that the enforcement function could not operate outside of their control, and thus the Security Council's broad power to intervene in world politics is set inside an institution of very limited membership (fifteen states, after the reforms of 1965) in which each of the five permanent (P5) members has a veto (Art. 27(3)) (see [Box 22.5](#)).

#### **Box 22.5: Key actors**

##### **The P5: Permanent members of the UN Security Council**

- China
- France
- Russia

- the United Kingdom
- the United States of America

The General Assembly was intended as a deliberative body with universal membership, space for open-ended discussion and a majoritarian-decision rule. It operates by majority rule (a two-thirds majority for ‘important’ matters: Art. 18(2)) and without a veto, and the consequence of this relatively [democratic](#) structure was that the great powers in 1945 restricted its powers to making recommendations to states or international organisations (Arts 10, 13). There is an intentionally inverse relationship between democratic structure and decision-making authority. The Council stands in an authoritative position over states with respect to matters of international peace and security; the framers of the Charter in 1945 were not willing to allow this power to leave the hands of the great powers. The General Assembly functions as the meeting place for the international community of governments, and its diversity and pluralism were thought safe only in a body that was limited to making recommendations. It is important, too, that the General Assembly brings together governments, not people.

The Security Council is granted ‘primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security’ (Art. 24(1)), and to that end states are required to: cede their own right to use force to settle disputes (Art. 2(4)); respect the decisions about peace and security the Council makes on their behalf (Arts 24, 25, 39, 42); and commit some of their military forces to the collective (Art. 43). The logic behind the Council is something like what Hobbes ([1968 \[1651\]](#)) had in mind in *Leviathan* to solve the problem of the state of nature: individuals must disarm and accept centralised monopoly on the use of force.

The Security Council monopolises global authority over war. Its power is activated by a two-part procedure set out in Chapter VII of the Charter: first, the Council must determine that there exists a breach of or threat to international peace and security (Art. 39); second, it must decide to call on the collective military forces of its members and deploy them to remedy the breach or threat (Art. 42). Military resources are loaned to the United Nations by states for the specific operation in question; the Council controls no military forces of its own, despite the intention of Article 43 that states should set aside for the Council some of their militaries.

The two-stage process is illustrated by the reaction to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. By Resolution 660 (2 August 1990) the Security Council identified 'a breach of international peace and security as regards the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait' and in Resolution 678 (29 November 1990) it authorised 'Member States co-operating with the Government of Kuwait ... to use all necessary means to uphold and implement resolution 660'.

The Iraq War is the paradigmatic example of the United Nations' centralised system of international enforcement in practice. It may also be *the* singular example, since no other UN operation under Chapter VII has been as legally coherent and uncontroversial, and many military adventures by states have been launched in the face of the Charter's prohibitions. The Libya intervention in 2011 comes close, as the Council authorised member-states to use force to protect civilians from the Libyan government (Res. 1973). International history since 1945 is littered with wars, threats and violations of international peace, yet the Council has used its authority to intervene only very conservatively. The practical political questions of when to intervene, against whom, for what goals, with what precedential effect and at whose expense have almost always prevented the Council from activating its full military potential. A very small number of peace-enforcement operations have been launched by the

Council, notably in Kuwait in 1990–91 and in Korea in 1950. Most of the Council's activity has involved pressuring states to change their policies while holding the threat of UN intervention in the background.

The General Assembly's authority is wider in scope but less binding than that of the Council. Its powers are set out in Articles 10–13. As a general matter, the Assembly 'may discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter' (Art. 10). The Assembly is the plenary body of the United Nations, meaning that it includes as members all of the [nation](#)-states in the United Nations. Each state gets one vote in the Assembly, and decisions require supporting votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting. While Article 10 authorises the Assembly to discuss 'any questions or any matters' of concern to the United Nations, the Assembly's power over those topics is limited to making 'recommendations' to states or to the Secretary-General, issuing reports and launching studies (see [Box 22.6](#)). General Assembly resolutions are therefore not legally binding. States' obligations to these recommendations are very limited: the Charter implies that members have a duty to take these recommendations seriously, but it does not create any formal legal obligation to implement or even consider them, let alone to force states to do anything. The General Assembly's power is therefore broad but also very shallow. It can consider and make recommendations on many topics but its outputs have no coercive authority.

### **Box 22.6: Key texts**

#### **UN Charter: The General Assembly**

##### **Article 9**

**1** The General Assembly shall consist of all the Members of the United Nations.

### **Article 10**

The General Assembly may discuss any questions or matters within the scope of the present Charter ... [and] make recommendations to the Members ... on any such questions or matters.

### **Article 18**

**1** Each member of the General Assembly shall have one vote.

**2** Decisions of the General Assembly on important questions shall be made by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting.

The one exception to this pattern is the Assembly's decisive power over the UN expenditure budget, and the allocation of costs among member states. This authority is established by Article 17, and it is noteworthy because it means that the sensitive matters of revenue and spending are decided by the Assembly by two-thirds majority vote, without any special influence reserved for the highest-contributing states. Critics of the United Nations, particularly conservatives in the United States, have taken this as evidence that UN spending is disconnected from or unaccountable to the rich states who contribute the largest shares of UN income (e.g. see Schaefer [2006](#)). This is not correct. That the United Nations is organised this way reflects the fact that in 1945 there was a dominant view that the spending decisions of the organisation were of interest to the general membership and not just to the great powers. In this case, the democratic impulse trumped the usual tendency for the strong states to keep close control

over important decisions. However, the power of the big contributors is accommodated in more subtle ways: the draft budget only reaches the Assembly after having passed through a committee that contains the major contributors and that operates by consensus. This committee (the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)) has sixteen members, elected from the General Assembly, and it receives the draft budget from the Secretary-General before sending it on to the Assembly. By customary agreement, the United States always has a member on the committee. In practice, therefore, the United States can veto the budget in its drafting stage – no budget can reach the Assembly without US approval. In a second accommodation to the influence of political power, the budget for [peacekeeping](#) missions is organised separately from the ‘regular’ budget described in Article 17, in an effort to insulate the regular budget from the disagreements that arose when the General Assembly, rather than the Security Council, launched peace operations in the 1950s and 1960s.

The constitutional arrangement of the Assembly means that it is the closest thing that currently exists to a comprehensive deliberative body of states. It may sometimes look like a global legislature, but it lacks the crucial ingredient of the capacity to pass legislation. Decisions of the Assembly come in the form of resolutions, and these are defined in the Charter as recommendations rather than decisions. Nevertheless, the Assembly’s deliberations and resolutions can, when the political forces align in their favour, take on political weight that is greater than their legal authority. They can sometimes be successfully presented as reflecting the view of the ‘international community’ of states. Several of the most famous GA resolutions illustrate the fact that their political impact sometimes far outweighs their very limited legal status. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights began its life as a declaration (not a resolution) by the General Assembly in 1948. This declaration is an excellent

example of how the Assembly can be used to reinforce [norms](#) or rules of customary international law. Similarly, the GA Resolution, known colloquially as ‘Uniting for Peace’ (GA 377), is influential, although far more legally uncertain. It includes the claim that the Assembly can use its recommendatory power to create new peace operations in cases when the Security Council fails to execute its ‘primary’ responsibility for peace and security under Article 24. In 1975, the Assembly passed a resolution (A/3379) declaring that ‘Zionism is a form of racism because it privileges one religious or ethnic group over all others’. This was revoked in 1991 by Resolution 46/86, but the controversy it attracted shows the political power of GA instruments beyond their purely legal authority.

## **The United Nations as actor, forum and resource**

The United Nations on paper can be very different from the United Nations in practice. While the rules and institutions described in the Charter set formal boundaries around its behaviour, much of what makes the organisation interesting and important arises as states and others strive to operate in and around those boundaries. The assorted complexities of the structure and practice of the United Nations mean that it displays itself in different ways in different contexts and to different observers. At times, the United Nations behaves like an independent actor in world politics, making its influence felt on states and others, and taking action in the world. At other times, it operates like a forum, where states and others come to discuss among themselves, with the United Nations providing an institutional setting where negotiations can take place. At still other times, the United Nations is a resource in the hands of other players, acting as an instrument or tool by which these others hope to advance their

goals. The three functions of actor, forum and resource must be combined by scholars in order to get a more complete picture of the power and nature of the United Nations (Hurd [2011b](#)).

### **The United Nations as an actor**

International organisations such as the United Nations are actors in world politics. They are constituted by international law as independent entities, separate from the states that are their founders and their members. The practical expression of this independence varies greatly across organisations, but in a formal sense they are corporate ‘persons’ – much like firms are ‘persons’ in domestic commercial law. At a minimum, this means that they have legal standing, with certain rights and obligations. These qualities were explicitly recognised for the United Nations in the ICJ opinion on *Reparations for Injuries suffered in the Service of the United Nations* in 1949, but that case merely affirmed what had existed in prior custom and practice: interstate organisations are legally independent from their founders. Beyond this legal minimum, being recognised as an actor requires some kind of social recognition, plus some kind of capacity for action. For the United Nations, these are evident in the ways that states treat the United Nations as a player of consequence in world politics – states appear to believe that it matters what the United Nations does and says. They feel the need to respond to unfavourable reports by the organisation, to influence the direction of UN action and to gain membership on important committees. These behaviours indicate that the United Nations has a conceptual status separate from its member states, with the potential to hinder or advance their interests.

### **The United Nations as a forum**

International organisations are also places in space and time. They are buildings, conferences, schedules of meetings and lists of members. Part of their utility is that they facilitate discussions among states, reducing their transaction costs and changing their political symbolism. The United Nations may have no role in these discussions other than providing a physical and political focal point, but this can be an important contribution, and very different to the ‘United Nations-as-actor’ function.

In its role as forum, the United Nations represents an extension of the nineteenth-century European practice of holding *ad hoc* themed conferences among governments, such as those that produced the first [Geneva Convention](#). This practice became largely institutionalised in the United Nations after 1945, with major UN-sponsored conferences on environment and development (Rio 1993), human rights (Vienna 1994) and the status of women (Mexico City 1975; Beijing 1995) among others. The value of the United Nations in these cases is that it can provide experienced logistical support for such large meetings, even though it may not itself be present as a formal participant. These cases represent the ‘forum’ function of international organisations in its clearest form. Most international organisations include a plenary body in which all members are represented, and the purpose of which is general deliberation about the work or themes of the organisation. The General Assembly is perhaps the best example of an international organisation in the shape of a forum. But beyond the United Nations, most organisations include a similar component: the International Criminal Court (ICC) has an Assembly of States Parties; the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) has its General Council; the International Labor Organization (ILO) has the International Labor Conference (Karns [2016](#)). The procedures for discussion in these bodies are relatively inclusive and open, so all members have the opportunity to participate. As a consequence, they tend to have either few executive powers or high standards of consensus for decisions.

The UN General Assembly fits the former category: it can make recommendations but has few powers to take legally binding decisions. The ILC fits the latter: it can create new obligations on members regarding domestic labour standards, but it allows governments to opt out if they do not wish to implement them.

The deliberative functions of these assemblies can have a powerful legitimating effect on the organisation and its decisions. They are also useful for facilitating side-negotiations among members. For instance, the original motivation behind the UN General Assembly was to have a place where states that were not great powers could express their views regarding the work of the organisation (Bosco [2009](#)), but its annual meetings in New York have come to include both the formal speeches by governments and the large and unknowable number of informal meetings on the side that are made possible by virtue of so many diplomats and leaders being in one city at the same time. The transaction costs for [diplomacy](#) are thereby reduced, and benefits might be achieved even if the formal speeches do not solve any particular problem.

### **The United Nations as a resource**

Finally, the United Nations can be seen as a political resource (or a source of political resources) that states use as they pursue their goals – domestic and international. States use the statements, decisions and other outputs that come from the United Nations as material to support their own positions, and many international disputes include competing interpretations of these materials. States fight over what international organisations should say and what they should do, and then fight over what these acts and statements mean for world politics. For instance, does Security Council Resolution 242 really require that Israel withdraw immediately from the Palestinian territory it seized in the 1967 war, as

the plain text would indicate, or only that it should negotiate a withdrawal in due time? Competing interpretations allow the parties to maintain that the Council supports their policies, and that the other side is violating its obligations. This is a source of powerful symbolic resources, which governments use as tools to further their goals. This could not happen in the absence of the United Nations, so it should be seen as being among the effects of having created the organisation in 1945. Much of what comes out of international organisations is useful to states in this way, and one might even say that anything that is not useful in this way is not likely to have much impact at all. This can be a source of power and autonomy for the organisation to the extent that it can control who uses its symbols and outputs. The Security Council, for instance, controls 'UN peacekeeping' as if it were a trademarked brand, and when it has allowed countries' military operations to be called 'peacekeeping' missions, it has demanded that they adhere to standards set by the Council. The General Assembly has much less capacity to act as a gatekeeper.

Seeing international organisations as resources rather than as solutions in themselves to problems also helps to emphasise some limits on their power and usefulness. The United Nations can be influential when circumstances are favourable, but it can also be marginalised when powerful states see no advantage in activating it. For instance, in the early 1980s the Secretary-General had prepared a diplomatic solution to the contested governance of Cambodia, but he and the entire United Nations were largely kept out of the process by a few states of the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#) group, which refused to negotiate with the Vietnamese government that controlled Cambodia (Annabi [1995](#); Pérez de Cuéllar [1997](#)). Only after the [geopolitics](#) of ASEAN changed in the late 1980s did his plan come to be implemented as the Paris Peace Agreement of 1991. The apparent 'failure' of the United Nations to deal effectively with the Cambodia problem in the 1980s was actually a result of the

fact that some powerful states insisted that the United Nations should *not* be used as a tool for solving the problem. The ‘resource’ view is an antidote to the common but misleading assumption that there is always, in principle, an international organisation answer to every diplomatic problem or humanitarian crisis. From Syria to the Haiti earthquake to the Rwandan [genocide](#), the contribution of international organisations to international problems is in part defined by the utility that states see in putting them to work. This also means that the United Nations is most likely to be used in ways that serve the interests of the Great Powers, since they are in the best position to control what it does. The practical history of the Council certainly affirms this, and it helps dispel the naïve ‘enchanted’ view that often informs writing about international organisations (Hurd [2016](#)).

#### **Box 22.7: Key texts**

##### **UN Charter: The Secretariat**

###### **Article 97**

The Secretariat shall comprise a Secretary-General and such staff as the Organization may require. The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. He [or she] shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization.

###### **Article 99**

The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his [or her] opinion

may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

#### **Article 100**

**1** In the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization. They shall refrain from any action which might reflect on their position as international officials responsible only to the Organization.

The three aspects of actor, forum and resource coexist in tension in the United Nations, and each perspective provides a distinct, though incomplete, view of the organisation. To see the United Nations exclusively as a forum leads to the mistake made by John Bolton (cited in Perlez [2001](#)), who maintained that the United Nations ‘does not exist’. What does exist, he implied, is a collection of independent states that sometimes choose to meet in the rooms of the UN building, and perhaps to add a UN label to their collective endeavours (i.e. a ‘forum’ and nothing else). This is a radically reductionist view of international politics and law: it claims that everything that is done through or by the United Nations can be reduced analytically to the behaviour of individual states without losing any meaning. It denies the possibility of corporate personhood for international organisations, and thus also the possibility that they might have positions or take actions independent of their members. This is an impossible position to sustain, since it requires that we deny that there is any difference between states acting alone and states acting through the United Nations. The

real world of international relations is full of examples that states react quite differently to what other states do as opposed to what international organisations do. Consider the US effort to gain Security Council approval for its invasion of Iraq in 2003, while John Bolton was in the US Department of State: the premise of that effort was that the Council could provide collective legitimisation for the invasion, and this would change how other states reacted to it. The US strategy of seeking Security Council support presumed that the audience of states would see a UN-supported invasion as more legitimate than one without Council approval, or than if the United States gained the state-by-state support of governments individually through [bilateral](#) efforts. If there is a difference in how the action is perceived depending on whether it is supported by a collection of individual states and supported by those states through the Council, then the reductionist view must be wrong. That difference represents the independent contribution of the Security Council to world politics, beyond its role as a forum or meeting place.

It is equally hard to sustain an entirely actor-centric view of the United Nations, or of most international organisations. The independence of even the strongest international organisation is always conditional on an alignment of social forces that is outside of its control. The Security Council, for instance, has the authority to intervene in world politics in any way it sees fit in response to anything it identifies as a threat to international peace and security. And yet its ability to take action on international security depends on the voluntary contributions of military resources by individual member states. As a result, the actor-like qualities in the international system that are legally enshrined by the Charter are drastically undercut in practice by member states. Both the independence of international organisations and their limits are central to some versions of the 'delegation' approach, which suggests that international organisations can be understood based on the act of delegation by which states

endow them with authority (Hawkins et al. [2006](#)). Once empowered by this delegated authority, the organisation may have considerable autonomy to deploy its powers as it wishes, and it may be a challenge for member states to control it. To overstate the independence of international organisations is as much a mistake as to understate it, and anywhere along this spectrum all claims about the autonomy of international organisations must be grounded in an empirical study of the organisation in question. There are no general answers to questions about the distribution of power and authority between states and international organisations. The challenge for the scholar is to figure out how to combine them and where to put the emphasis to best suit the research problem at hand. Michael Barnett ([2003](#)) provides a good model in his book on how the United Nations came to abandon Rwanda at the time of the genocide in 1994: he examines the positions that the strongest states on the Security Council brought to the question (a ‘forum’ view of the United Nations); he also looks at the position of the Secretary-General and his staff (thus recognising that the United Nations was also an actor in the process); and how the collective decisions of the Council would be perceived and manipulated by other states and by the *genocidaires* themselves (i.e. how the United Nations would be used as a tool by other players).

## Conclusion

As actor, forum and resource, the United Nations is the world’s most comprehensive international organisation in terms of both its membership and the scope of its authority. It encompasses all countries and potentially all policy areas that carry international implications. Its salience in international politics is remarkable, given that most of its organs do not have the legal authority to take

decisions that are binding on its members. The General Assembly and ECOSOC are explicitly limited to making recommendations rather than taking decisions, and the Secretariat has no authority at all over member-states. The few exceptions to this pattern are interesting precisely because they stand out so clearly from the norm, and because they subvert the conventional wisdom that international organisations are legally subordinate to their members. The binding powers in the United Nations include the General Assembly's power over the budget and the Security Council's authority to enact military interventions. The most controversial moments in the life of the United Nations arise when its powers come up against the interests of strong players, and in the resulting contests of legal and political strength we see the power (and limits) of the United Nations most clearly. However, much of the UN contribution to the world takes place in a quieter register, in moments where its resources and its subtle political influence are put to use in the pursuit of the goals of the Preamble. These are less visible than the episodes of high tension, but they likely contribute more towards realising the collective values of the United Nations than what is accomplished during the news-making crises.

## **Discussion questions**

**22.1** Assess John Bolton's claim that the United Nations does not exist. In what ways is it true, and in what ways not? Explain your own position.

**22.2** What should be done with the Trusteeship Council now that it has no more territories to manage? Consider its utility and its liabilities in the contemporary world – one that includes failed states and a commitment to anti-colonialism.

**22.3** The Security Council has considerable freedom to interpret the meaning of 'international peace and security', and thus can redefine the only limit placed on

it by the Charter. How has the content of that phrase been understood by the Council in recent crises? Is the Council expanding its authority by reinterpreting those crucial words?

**22.4** How different might the United Nations look if we were writing the Charter today? Would this be an improvement over the organisation as we have inherited it from 1945?

### *Further reading*

Alvarez, José E. 2006, *International organizations as law-makers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *Examines the growing influence of international organisations such as the United Nations in making and implementing international law.*

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Bailey, Sydney D. and Daws, Sam 1998, *The procedure of the UN Security Council*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A useful overview of the way the UN Security Council works.*

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Bosco, David 2009, *Five to rule them all: The UN Security Council and the making of the modern world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A good account of the history and evolution of the UN Security Council.*

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Chesterman, Simon, Franck, Thomas M. and Malone, David M. 2008, *Law and practice of the United Nations: Documents and commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A helpful collection of primary materials and scholarly commentary.*

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Hurd, Ian 2013, *International organizations: Politics, law, practice*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Theoretically explores the United*

*Nations and other international organisations.*

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Karns, Margaret P. 2016, 'General assemblies and assemblies of states parties', in Jacob Katz Cogan, Ian Hurd and Ian Johnstone (eds), *Oxford Handbook of International Organizations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An excellent short overview of the UN General Assembly.*

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Russell, Ruth B. 1958, *A history of the United Nations Charter: The role of the United States 1940–1945*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. *The classic account of the founding of the United Nations.*

# Non-state actors: Multinational corporations and international non-governmental organisations



**James Goodman**

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[Multinational corporations: Transnationalised material power](#)

[International non-governmental organisations: Transnationalised normative power](#)

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## Introduction

World politics has always had a plurality of players. The key is not so much to determine which have primacy, but how they interact to produce the prevailing [order](#). This chapter is structured around a discussion of [multinational corporations \(MNCs\)](#) and international non-governmental organisations

(INGOs) respectively. Each is discussed in terms of: first, the degree to which it has [transnationalised](#); second, the extent to which it constitutes a social formation able to exert international agency; and third, the degree to which it is able to marshal political influence and status. It is argued that there is no necessary antagonism between [state](#) and non-state realms. Instead, relations between state and non-state forces are intermeshed and shaped by broader systemic conflicts. The chapter charts material class antagonisms that shape the role of MNCs and INGOs, and argues that these generate patterns of transnational contestation within international relations.

In the post-[Cold War](#) context, [globalisation](#) theory made considerable headway. For hyperglobalisationists at least (see [Chapter 28](#)), newly powerful transnational forces were overwhelming state and interstate incumbents. With US [power](#) embedded in a range of interstate frameworks, a model of multilateral [unipolarity](#) appeared to be emerging – a model in which US dominance was embedded and restrained by a network of [multilateral](#) institutions. More recently, we have seen the advent of a significantly more [unilateralist](#) unipolarity, as the United States increasingly has disengaged itself from multilateral institutions by adopting exceptionalist and pre-emptive doctrines. The consequences for globalisation [theory](#) have been wide ranging. By the mid-2000s, not only had the hype been exposed as ideology, but the ideology itself was claimed to have been superseded (see McGrew [2007](#)).

The global financial collapse of 2008 exemplified the problem. The crisis was driven by non-state actors (banks and financial institutions), but it was concerted state action that restored the system. Resulting bail-outs and stimulus packages amounted to a fifth of global GDP, and produced a wave of austerity (*Harvard Business Review* [2010](#)). By 2016, advocates of financial globalisation had been widely discredited, and new challengers were gaining government both on the left and right. In this context, promoters of financial globalisation had

little to offer: the International Monetary Fund pronounced its continued faith in global markets while acknowledging that the ‘lack of income growth and a rise in inequality have opened the door for populist, inward-looking policies’ (International Monetary Fund [2016](#): x). Openness to global markets was positioned against ‘inward-looking’ statism, reasserting neoliberal and globalist ideologies in the face of their collapse. Globalists have indeed persistently counterposed states and globalisation: the key weakness of globalisation theory has been the assumed impact of globalisation on state power. As Rosenberg ([2000](#): 15) argues, the return of state-centred politics has been ‘as devastating for globalisation theory as it has always been for alternative approaches which have left untheorised the terrain of [geopolitics](#)’. This chapter attempts to clarify the role of [non-state actors](#) in relation to states and the states-system, and posit a more ‘genuinely social theory of the international system’ (Rosenberg, [2000](#): 15), one that does not abstract states from broader social and economic processes and structures.

## **Multinational corporations: Transnationalised material power**

The definition and role of multinational corporations is hotly debated. [Transnational corporations \(TNCs\)](#) are usually defined as corporate entities that have no clear national base; MNCs are then presented as nationally centred entities with international interests. The UNCTAD World Investment Report finds that most corporations operating across national borders fall into the MNC category: its ‘index of nationality’ measures the foreign proportion of assets, sales and employment for large corporates and finds the bulk are nationally centred (UNCTAD [2005](#)). But, while it may be more accurate to use the MNC

category, this does not mean the impact of MNCs is primarily national. If we examine the ways in which MNCs behave, we find their qualitative impact is much broader than their operational scope would suggest. The power that MNCs exert is embedded within existing interstate [hierarchies](#) and power structures, but MNCs are not simply tools of nationally centred elites. They operate against as much as within national contexts and, as social formations, allow an interlocking of national elites to the extent of forming a class bloc, what Leslie Sklair ([2001](#)) calls the ‘transnational capitalist class’.

### **Transnationalisation: Multinational corporations**

The central driver and rationale for MNCs is the exercise of material power across national jurisdictions. Across finance, production and distribution, MNCs exploit power-gaps between spatially fixed governments and fluid cross-national flows of money and commodities. Transnational finance relations express hierarchies of risk – in effect, assessments of the future potential for capital accumulation – with each national context measured against the other. Transnationalised productive relations reflect the strategies of dominant multinational firms in exploiting and reproducing divergent relations of production and consumption. Trading, distribution and retail relations express hierarchies of international dependence through unequal exchange, embedded in a diffused culture-ideology of consumerism.

Finance MNCs set the pace. In 2004 the assets of the top ten financial MNCs amounted to US\$13 trillion, while the assets of the top ten non-financial MNCs stood at US\$3.1 trillion (UNCTAD [2006](#): A.1.11; A.1.14). Finance MNCs have ascended the corporate league tables: in 1989, none of the world’s fifty largest companies was based in the finance sector; in 2003 there were fourteen such companies on the list (UNCTAD [2005](#): 19). The success of

finance houses is reflected in a wholesale financialisation of assets. Finance and business accounted for 25 per cent of total foreign direct investment in 1990; by 2004, it accounted for 47 per cent (UNCTAD [2006](#): A.1.3). Total international private lending stood at about a tenth of global income in 1980; in 2006, it stood at nearly half of global income (McGuire and Tarashev [2006](#)). In 1978, finance flows were ten times the value of world trade; in 2000, they stood at about fifty times the value of world trade, with total flows amounting to US\$1.5 trillion per day. In large part this reflects the explosion in financial derivatives: there were 478 million derivatives created in 1990, by 2004 there were 6144 million (International Monetary Fund 2006a: Statistical Annex, Table 6). In terms of value, in 2003 options and futures stood at US\$36 786 billion; in just three years that had risen to US\$84 020 billion (Bank for International Settlements [2006](#): Statistical Annex, Table 23A). With global gross domestic product (GDP) standing at about US\$40 trillion, this suggests a remarkable process of global concentration and financialisation.

In terms of manufacturing MNCs, in 1971, there were 7000 companies with overseas subsidiaries in operation; by 2005, that number had risen to 77 000, with close to 800 000 affiliates (UNCTAD [2006](#): 9; Annex Table A.1.6). In 1996, MNCs accounted for one-fifth of global manufacturing output and one-third of private assets. In 1982, MNC assets stood at about one-fifth of global income; in 2005 MNC assets were marginally higher than world income (calculated from UNCTAD [2005](#): 9). Perhaps most importantly, MNCs control 50 per cent of global research and development funding (UNCTAD [2005](#)). At the same time, there has been an upsurge in cross-national mergers and acquisitions. Centred on the developed countries of the global North, in 2004 alone total merger activity accounted for at least US\$3800 trillion, or approximately 9 per cent of global GDP (UNCTAD [2005](#): 14). The result has been an increased concentration of economic power across the various sectors of

economic activity. Aside from finance, a key emerging sector is in the provision of services, reflecting the global wave of infrastructure, telecom, power and water privatisation (accounting for one-fifth of the largest 100 MNCs in 2003) (UNCTAD [2005](#): 15).

MNCs also play a central role in trade and retail activity, and in associated media and advertising industries. A small coterie of media empires span the globe, providing much of what suffices for global entertainment, advertising and news (McChesney [2001](#)). Four conglomerates account for half of global advertising and public relations; one conglomerate, WPP, claims 300 of the Fortune Global 500 companies (a list of the world's 500 richest corporations) as clients (Miller and Dinan [2003](#)). Meanwhile, the retail sector has created the world's largest private employer: Wal-Mart, with 1.7 million workers. In 1982, total MNC sales were equivalent to about a quarter of global income; by 1995, this had risen to 50 per cent (calculated from UNCTAD [2005](#): 9). In 1998, UNCTAD estimated that about half of MNC trade was intra-firm trade, allowing MNCs to routinely declare profit in the lowest-taxing economies (see [Box 23.1](#)). Since the late 1990s, the scope of MNC activity has been extended with the growing internationalisation of state-owned companies, especially from newly industrialising countries in Asia, and by the wider involvement of smaller companies in global value chains, produced by cascading contractual obligations (Jaworek and Kuzel [2015](#); UNCTAD 2016).

### **Box 23.1:** Discussion points

#### **MNCs and tax avoidance**

MNCs routinely avoid tax. In 2002, US MNCs 'sheltered' more than half of their total offshore profits in low-tax jurisdictions. In 2006, the

Australian Tax Commissioner stated that MNCs accounted for the bulk of tax avoidance in Australia.

In an effort to address this, in 2003 the Pacific Association of Tax Administrators, a group that draws together tax authorities in Australia, the United States, Canada and Japan, produced a scheme to enable corporate compliance with Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) guidelines. Tellingly, the scheme was voluntary. In practice, tax minimisation and sheltering have become legitimate, accepted by the OECD as unavoidable. Governments, meanwhile, compete with each other to cut corporate taxes in order to attract investment funds.

The United States – the world's most powerful state – has been ahead of the pack in this 'race to the bottom'. In 2004, the American Jobs Creation Act provided a one-off tax cut on repatriated profit from 35 per cent to 5.25 per cent, explicitly to encourage MNCs to bring funds back to the United States (Webb [2004](#)).

In 2015, UNCTAD highlighted the continuing failure to rein in tax avoidance by MNCs, finding about a third of MNC investment stocks based in tax-havens (UNCTAD [2015](#)). In 2016, in the context of continuing 'revelations that firms large and small have been using offshore financial centres and jurisdictions to evade or avoid taxes', it restated the 'urgent need for international tax and investment policy coordination' (UNCTAD 2016: 22).

### **International agency: Social formation**

In the wake of MNC growth, global material power has become increasingly concentrated. A report on global wealth found the wealthiest 2 per cent own 51 per cent of the world's wealth (Davies et al. [2006](#): 26). In terms of income, the gap between the richest fifth and the poorest fifth has widened from 31:1 in 1960 to 74:1 in 1997 (Pieterse [2004](#): 63). The high-income, high-wealth class has become increasingly self-aware and able to act for itself, forging strategies that deliver discernible political leverage for MNC elites (see Carroll and Carson [2003](#)).

In the first instance, MNCs create a bidding war between governments. They impose a systemic restraint on government measures that delimit rates of return, such as labour protections, corporate taxation, environmental regulation or other limits to 'market access'. Deregulated corporate enclaves – 'offshore' financial havens, 'export processing zones' (or 'free trade zones'), 'flags of convenience' (registering merchant ships to countries other than the ships' owners), '*maquiladoras*' (factories on the Mexican side of the United States–Mexico border manufacturing goods for export back to the United States) and 'special economic zones' – emerge as aberrations or exceptions that over time become institutionalised into [norms](#) of 'good governance'. In 1975, for instance, there were seventy-nine export processing zones worldwide; in 2002 there were 3000 (Hayter [2004](#)). Such norms are then expressed as conditionalities imposed by financial institutions such as the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#), or as corporate guidelines generated by [hegemonic](#) blocs such as the OECD, or as international standards-setting [regimes](#) for 'market access' such as the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) – or indeed as direct corporate rights regimes with trade and finance agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). MNCs, and the structural incentives they create, are chief instigators in the emergence of these regimes.

MNCs ‘cascade’ across the globe: while 80 per cent of MNC parents are based in high-income countries, about 60 per cent of their branch plants are located in low-income countries. MNCs create global supply chains, webs of outsourced risk that exert influence at arm’s length. Their power extends into the ‘domestic’ sphere through franchises, licensing arrangements, contract growing, supply contracts, equity investment, cross-ownership and joint ventures. One good example is the McDonald’s restaurant franchise, where all the risk rests with the owner-franchisee. MNCs set the pace for the ‘domestic’ economy: as observers of ‘McDonaldisation’ and ‘Walmartisation’ attest, MNCs establish transnational industry standards. Not surprisingly, the management consultancy industry, concentrated in just four companies, underwent phenomenal growth in the 1990s. Three global credit ratings agencies – Standard and Poor’s, Moody’s and Fitch – now set the framework for national policy-making worldwide. Governments pay the agencies six-figure sums to provide a ‘sovereign’ rating that determines access to international finance. In 1975, Standard and Poor’s conducted three country ratings; in 2004, it produced more than a hundred.

### **Political status and influence**

Corporations pursue joint political interests through international business associations. The International Chamber of Commerce, for instance, has been in place since 1919. Over the last thirty years, these international business NGOs have proliferated and become increasingly integrated (Carroll and Carson [2003](#)). A key approach is to disseminate the notion of popular [capitalism](#) – an approach that has generated whole media conglomerates, such as *Fortune* and *Forbes*, dedicated to ranking global corporations, engendering pride in global business and recruiting aspirants. At the same time, transnational [alliances](#) of free-

marketeting think tanks have emerged, funded by MNCs, with remarkable access to the international policy-making process (Struyk [2002](#)).

The MNC lobby is most clearly manifested in the World Economic Forum (WEF) (Robinson and Harris [2000](#)). Created in 1987, the WEF draws major MNCs to its annual conference in Davos, Switzerland. The Forum self-consciously develops strategy: the theme at Davos 2007 was ‘Shaping the Global Agenda’. The Forum has discussed a yearly survey gauging corporate reputation: conducted in thirty countries with 20 000 interviewees, it shows a decline in the trust accorded to ‘global companies’, to approximately 45 per cent by 2015 (GlobeScan [2015](#)). In 2016 the Forum stated baldly that ‘research continues to confirm that, ultimately, the public still does not trust businesses or business leaders to do what is right’ (World Economic Forum [2015](#): 3).

In response to this ‘trust deficit’ the WEF aspires to ‘entrepreneurship in the global public interest’, and positions itself as the leading global policy forum, actively recruiting non-corporate ‘Global Leadership Fellows’. Lobbying is not always successful: since the late 1990s, several states in Asia and Latin America have intervened to constrain finance flows, demonstrating abiding state capacity (Higgott and Phillips [2000](#)). Nevertheless, as UNCTAD reports, of the 271 government measures affecting foreign investment in 2004, 87 per cent favoured MNCs, reducing the average tax for MNCs from 29.7 per cent to 26.5 per cent (UNCTAD [2005](#): 26). One of these 2004 measures was the American Jobs Creation Act, discussed in [Box 23.1](#).

MNCs have also influenced international public policy agendas. MNC interventions into the sustainability debate, such as through the Business Council on Sustainable Development and the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), are especially significant (Sklair [2001](#)). The GCC was set up by a group of oil and energy MNCs in 1989 to target the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), and helped to limit the Climate Change Convention to

declarations of intent. After the 1997 [Kyoto Protocol](#) put some limited commitments into place, the GCC successfully campaigned for the United States to renege on its commitments. In 2002, the group was officially wound up, declaring that it had ‘served its purpose’. Corporate PR now sits at the heart of the [United Nations](#), with a ‘Global Compact’ that explicitly offers MNCs the possibility of ‘leveraging the UN’s global reach and convening power’ (Coleman [2003](#)).

Finally, there is recourse to legal offence, to sue critics and claim compensation. The corporate use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) became so prevalent in the United States in the 1990s that by 2006 more than thirty-five US states had introduced legislation to protect freedom of speech. But governments themselves are not beyond the reach of corporate litigation. From 1994, under Chapter 11 of NAFTA, corporations gained the right to sue signatory governments for discriminatory regulation. NAFTA’s investor protection provisions, which treat corporations ‘as an equal subject of [international law](#), on a par with governments’, have since been extended into other free trade agreements and investment agreements (Gal-Or [2005](#): 122) (see [Box 23.2](#)).

#### **Box 23.2: Discussion points**

##### **Investment protection and corporate–state litigation**

Investor protection commitments and rights to arbitration for corporates have been written into a growing proliferation of international investment agreements. There were less than fifty investment agreements in 1990. A surge in agreement-making through the 1990s, slowing into the 2000s, left three thousand agreements in place by 2009 (UNCTAD [2005](#)).

Increasingly, corporations have used these agreements to sue governments. When a corporation believes it has suffered from government actions, and believes those actions violate investment agreements, it can often make a claim for lost earnings under an investment agreement. The claim then goes to an international arbitration court for decision.

By 2015, 608 cases had been taken against ninety-nine countries (including thirty-nine cases against the Argentine Government following the country's financial crisis). Several cases have led to large payouts. In 2004, Slovakia paid \$834 million and in 2014, in the highest award to data, Russia was required to pay \$50 billion.

Developing countries, UNCTAD notes, are especially 'vulnerable'. Increasingly, though, arbitrators are ruling against corporate claims in about 40 per cent of cases. After awarding claims against the Argentine Government, arbitrators have accepted that the financial crisis created a 'state of necessity' that absolved it of obligations under investment treaties (see UNCTAD [2005](#)). Nonetheless, cases taken against states under the agreements rose 'dramatically' in the early 2000s, reaching 59 cases in 2013 (UNCTAD [2005](#), [2015](#)). Reflecting this, in 2015, more than fifty countries were reviewing their commitment to international investment agreements (UNCTAD [2015](#)).

Overall, MNCs are transnational actors, 'oligopolistic at a global level', capable of exerting significant influence on the world stage, influence expressed in various forms of legal recognition of their role and status (Nolan et al. [2002](#): 101). Such legal personality is hardly new – it can, for instance, be thought of as

‘transnational [mercantilism](#)’ (Graz [2004](#)). Nevertheless, it is clearly growing, complemented by an expanding international law of state–MNC arbitration (Goodman [2014](#); Teubner [1997](#)).

## **International non-governmental organisations: Transnationalised normative power**

INGOs are most simply defined as international organisations that represent sectors of society independently of governments. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defines an INGO as any international organisation that is not established by an interstate treaty. In order to be accorded consultative status with ECOSOC, INGOs must be of recognised standing, representative, accountable, transparent, democratic and funded by voluntary non-government sources. The Union of International Associations uses a similar seven-point definition, including requirements for autonomy from governments and operations in more than two countries. These definitions encompass a wide variety of organisations, including business NGOs. The focus here is on public-interest INGOs that engage in international advocacy in the name of a cause or issue.

### **Transnationalisation: INGOs**

Over the last thirty years, an INGO ‘explosion’ has paralleled the MNC ‘explosion’ (Josselin and Wallace [2001](#): 1–2). In 2002, the UNDP described the INGO boom as a ‘revolution’, noting that one-fifth of the 37 000 INGOs in place in 2000 had emerged since 1990, and that these had generated more than 20 000 INGO networks, a ‘revolution [that] parallels the rapid growth of global business over the same period’ (UNDP [2002](#): 102). The growth continued into the 2000s,

with 56 000 in place by 2010, showing a ‘stable consolidated growth pattern’ (Kaldor et al. [2012](#)).

Since 2000, the Centre for Global Governance (CGG) has used data from the Union of International Associations to map the INGO phenomenon. Its data show a worldwide 43 per cent rise in the number of INGO secretariats (to 17 428) between 1992 and 2002, with the rise in low-income countries standing at 27 per cent (Kaldor et al. [2003](#): Record 15, 327–33). Membership growth, however, has been faster in lower-and middle-income contexts (Anheier and Katz [2004](#): 338). Secretariats remained concentrated in high-income contexts: of the fourteen cities housing more than a hundred INGO secretariats, two were in the United States, one in Japan and nine in Western Europe, and one each in Africa and Latin America. In 2010, most INGOs remained in the high-income countries, especially in the United States (more than eight thousand), although there had been some growth elsewhere – especially in China (at 152 secretariats) (Kaldor et al. [2012](#)). The CGG project thus identifies the geopolitical heartland of the United States and Northwest Europe as the centre of global INGOism, with much of the global South peripheral.

The CGG findings confirm the expansion of INGOs while suggesting INGO distribution mirrors interstate hierarchies. The pattern is replicated at the United Nations, where only 251 of the 1550 registered NGOs are based in developing countries (UNDP [2002](#): 111). Indeed, another assessment finds the North–South divide in INGO participation to be proportionately deeper than North–South income divides (Beckfield [2003](#)). International relations of advocacy are clearly conjoined with interstate relations: we may further argue that INGOs are simply an international version of the ‘extended state’, an expression of interstate hegemony over ‘global civil society’ (Hirsch [2003](#)). If INGOs are to be seen as an emergent force, capable of mobilising alternate sources of power, a different distribution would be expected.

Researchers in political geography have tested these possibilities, in one case looking at connectivity between INGOs as an alternate measure of INGO geography (Taylor [2004](#)). The resulting maps of INGO connectivity reveal a different pattern, where ‘Nairobi, Bangkok, New Delhi and Manila [are] at least as important as Brussels, London and Washington’, suggesting INGOs are indeed creating their own autonomous trans-urban geography (Taylor [2004](#): 272). Other studies of network connectivity are more cautious, although these also point to a strong fluidity across North and South (Katz and Anheier [2005](#)). Another study tested explanations for INGO activity and found a strong correlation between national membership of interstate organisations and INGO growth, stressing that the ‘state still matters tremendously’ (Smith and Wiest [2005](#)).

Whether or not hierarchies among INGO coalitions directly mirror interstate hierarchies, INGO advocacy has different drivers from interstate politics, and forces into view an alternative geopolitics centring on **normative** claims (Bebbington [2004](#)). Policy advocacy to address global problems such as environmental change, global development, labour rights and gender division rests on the capacity to mobilise legitimacy across the North–South axis. Clearly, INGOs are inadequate as channels for formal political representation (Chandhoke [2005](#)). Yet INGO power relations, unlike MNC relations, rest on normative claims to legitimacy grounded in transnational consciousness (Hudson [2001](#)).

### **International agency: Social formation**

There is no doubt that INGOs have an important influence on international political agendas. As Halliday ([2001](#): 2) argues, ‘the climate of international opinion, be it that of states or informed public opinion, *has* been significantly

affected by what these NGOs, linked to social change, have brought about' (emphasis in original). INGOs have drawn on a vast font of legitimacy as representatives of public opinion in their confrontations with corporations and governments, establishing something of a 'pro-NGO norm' (Reimann [2006](#)). Reflecting this, the GlobeScan global trust survey mentioned above finds that NGOs attract consistently high levels of trust, with approximately 80 per cent of those surveyed agreeing that NGOs would 'operate in the best interests of our society' (GlobeScan [2015](#)).

The influence of INGOs is often seen as extending the domestic public sphere into international contexts (Price [2003](#)). Advocacy INGOs can be seen as vehicles for 'globalisation from below', offering an antidote to 'predatory globalisation' (Falk [2000](#)). Such vehicles can be seen as prefiguring new forms of 'cosmopolitan [democracy](#)', filling political vacuums between transnationalised power sources and national democratic structures (Held [1995](#)). In the process, INGOs may be interpreted as extending forms of global citizenship, enabling the application of universal principles of citizen rights beyond state borders (Linklater [1998](#)).

INGOs do indeed act as semi-autonomous institutional nodes, promoting a deepened globalisation. They mediate and translate normative principles and discourses from one context to another, creating a politics of flows that constitutes a less hierarchical transnational politics (Walker [1994](#)). While INGOs find their inspiration in transnational fields of contention, they find political traction in relation to states and interstate regimes (Joachim [2003](#)). INGOs make claims on states and interstate bodies, and reproduce state centrality. Their leverage rests on the capacity to deploy normative and informational power, provoking public argument about the most desirable or necessary course of action for governments and for interstate bodies (Holzscheiter [2005](#)). Confined to the non-state realms of 'global civil society', they constitute a self-limited

‘loyal’ opposition that respects [Lockean](#) liberal categories of state and non-state, public and private, and reproduces these as naturalised universals (Chandhoke [2005](#)). INGOs are therefore not necessarily pitted against states: like MNCs, INGOs constitute transnational realms of action that realign rather than transcend interstate power relations. We may see INGOs, then, not so much as harbingers of a new order but as key players in reforming the existing order.

### **Political status and influence**

A central factor in the growth of INGOs as players in international relations is the capacity to politicise cross-national issues under-addressed by state and interstate sources of authority. Benefiting from the increased connectivity that results from transnational communication, INGOs are able to expose the inadequacies of existing frameworks, and mobilise public opinion to challenge both the policies and legitimacy of interstate agencies. Through the 1990s, INGOs actively constructed their own capacity, primarily through coalition-building targeted on MNCs and interstate bodies, with considerable success (Yanacopulosi [2005](#)). Reflecting this, INGOs are more prominent in countries that are engaged with interstate institutions (Smith and Wiest [2005](#)). These ‘transnational advocacy networks’, and the sources of political leverage they provide, have become a crucial aspect of INGO activity (Keck and Sikkink [1998](#)). Indeed, given their orientation to transnational concerns, INGOs have at times had an advantage over MNCs in interstate policy-making (Kellow [2002](#)).

INGO coalitions play a formative role in a range of international policy issues, from the development of international [human rights](#) regimes to the management of global environmental change, to the creation of international norms on the status of women. One recent example is the role of INGOs in contesting the Green Economy agenda at the United Nations World Summit on

Sustainable Development in 2012 (Goodman and Salleh [2014](#)). On these and other issues, INGOs have become key agents in instigating and encouraging the emergence of interstate normative and policy regimes (Reimann [2006](#)) (see [Box 23.3](#)). In the process, INGOs ‘find themselves involved in setting the agenda for political negotiations and decision-making’ (Hirsch [2003](#): 250).

**Box 23.3:** Discussion points

**INGOs ‘catalyse change’**

Since 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has published the yearly *Human Development Report*. The report has been instrumental in promoting a holistic measure of international development.

In 2002 the report was subtitled ‘Deepening democracy in a fragmented world’, and focused on democratic involvement as a key aspect of development. The report discussed deepened democracy at the global level, pointing to INGOs as key agents for cross-border democratisation. The UNDP *Human Development Report* cited six examples of INGO campaigns that had forced the creation of new interstate agreements and regimes:

- the Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief
- campaigns for essential HIV/AIDS drugs
- the campaign for an International Criminal Court
- anti-dams campaigns
- anti-poverty campaigns, and
- campaigns for corporate responsibility.

All had been led by INGO coalitions, demonstrating INGO capacity and ‘potential to catalyse change’. According to the report, INGO campaigns herald a ‘new global politics’ (UNDP [2002](#)).

The role played by INGOs is formally recognised, but only in a limited sense. In 1986, for instance, the Council of Europe recognised INGOs, with the proviso that they first be recognised in a national jurisdiction. The 1996 resolution regulating the role of NGOs in UN conferences clearly states that ‘active participation of non-governmental organisations therein, while welcome, does not entail a negotiating role’. In 2002, the UNDP outlined a series of responsibilities for INGOs, effectively imposing ground rules for INGO engagement (UNDP [2002](#)). While interstate bodies may seek to circumscribe their formal role, INGOs have become deeply engaged with interstate regimes, to a significant degree influencing intergovernmentalism, such as at the UN Millennium Forum (Alger [2002](#)).

As central players in ‘complex multilateralism’, INGOs have tailored their proposals for interstate bodies and have become increasingly professionalised (Martens [2006](#)). In response, interstate bodies have adapted procedures to enable structured dialogue with INGOs, such as through inclusion in government delegations, consultation, involvement in convention drafting, acceptance of alternative reports and accreditation arrangements (Cooper and Hocking [2000](#)). In some contexts, INGOs have entered into tripartite relations with corporations and intergovernmental institutions – whether in service delivery, compliance monitoring or projecting influence (Ottaway [2001](#)). Such engagement comes at a price, as INGOs are required to accept the institutional legitimacy of interstate bodies and of their dominant policy frames (Kamat [2004](#)). A good example

drawn from the field of global environmental policy is the role of the Climate Action Network in negotiations over the Climate Change Convention, and the subsequent Kyoto Protocol. The Network aggregates opinion within the transnational environment movement, correlating and calibrating its proposals to the negotiating agenda (Paterson et al. [2003](#)). In the process, the interstate regime is bent to the needs of environment NGOs, but the reverse is also true (Haas [2002](#)).

While INGOs play a key role in generating and collaborating with some interstate initiatives, they have also been successful in exposing and halting others. These interventions are embedded in transnational perspectives, but gain political leverage by exploiting interstate divisions. An important and relatively early example was the campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment – a corporate rights agreement proposed by the OECD in the mid-1990s. Here INGO campaigners deliberately played national jurisdictions off against each other (Goodman and Ranald [1999](#)). This same ‘monkey-wrenching’ approach was used successfully to block the WTO’s Millennium Round in 1999, and also the subsequent WTO Development Round, which finally unravelled in 2006. These presaged the increasingly successful effort in 2015–16 in halting the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which would institutionalise new multilateral investor–state dispute mechanisms, as well as offer deepened MNC market access.

INGOs have also sought to generate their own positive programs (see the survey in Steger et al. [2013](#)). The World Social Forum (WSF), first staged in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001 as a deliberate counter to the WEF, was deliberately geared to developing such agendas (Soeane and Taddei [2002](#)). The WEF Davos forum had been the focus for protesters in 1998. In 1999, a counter-conference was organised in Davos, and in 2000 an anti-Davos ‘global forum’ was held in Paris (Houtart and Polet [2001](#)). In 2001, the World Social Forum (WSF) was

convened to debate alternatives to the WEF, and symbolically located in Brazil, part of the developing world (Byrd [2005](#)). Since 2001, the social forum process, expressed as a dialogue for alternatives in the WSF Charter of Principles, has been highly influential. It has attracted many tens of thousands of participants, and has been replicated across the globe. Subsequently the WSF moved to countries of Asia and Africa, deepening its legitimacy beyond the Latin American context. INGO involvement in the WSF lent an infrastructure to the global justice movement that emerged in the early 2000s. Most recently, in the face of the so-called ‘War on Terror’, INGOs and wider social movements were able to proactively engage the states-system, deploying their autonomy to influence the agenda, and in 2003 mount the largest mobilisation the world has seen in anti-[war](#) demonstrations in capital cities across the world (Rupert [2003](#)). Since 2003, the WSF has maintained its relevance in promoting ‘global democracy’ (Smith et al. [2014](#)) – for instance, in 2012 directly contesting the UN’s Green Economy agenda (Goodman and Salleh [2014](#)), and in 2016 hosting a major gathering in Montreal.

Positioned at the nexus between transnational flows and national jurisdictions, INGOs have charted channels for influence, in the process broadening the logic of interstate politics. They have been key players in a ‘new public diplomacy’ where governments exercise power with an eye to normative INGO agendas (Vickers [2004](#)). They have also charted alternatives to official channels, constructing their own shadow structures (Goodman [2007](#)). These are highly uneven, especially in their North–South dimensions, reflecting the contingent and limited logic of transnational awareness and consciousness (Kiely [2005](#)). The imposition of restrictions specifically designed to constrain INGO activity by governments, including Russia, China and India, is perhaps the clearest recent indicator of INGOs’ increasing importance. Despite these

impositions, INGO leverage remains, both as a contingent present-day reality and as a transformative potential.

## Conclusion

MNCs and INGOs have a central and abiding [constitutive](#) role in international relations. As non-state actors, though, they are embedded in the interstate system. From Cold War [bipolarisation](#) to post-Cold War US predominance and the revival of American exceptionalism after the 9/11 [terrorist](#) attacks, non-state forces have been harnessed as constituent elements of [sovereign states](#). They have also persistently constituted themselves and exercised their own autonomy: international antagonism between corporate power exemplified by MNCs and ‘people power’ expressed by advocacy INGOs are thus much more than an interstate conflict. States and interstate bodies clearly play a role as the vehicle for the corporate rights agenda and as the main focus for INGO appeals. But it is the non-state players – the MNC business associations and advocacy INGOs – that define the terms of the conflict. This non-state dynamic of agency and contestation generates its own autonomy, shaping definitions of the global common good. In this respect, their role is not so much political as meta-political.

Such transnational contestation is most clearly expressed in the conflict between the WEF and the WSF. The similarities between the two are instructive: both seek to frame the public sphere through agenda-setting strategic interventions; both are predicated on the principle of dialogue and engagement on how best to address mutual problems. In both, there is a deliberate attempt to articulate and assert legitimacy on the world stage and thereby influence governmental and interstate bodies. Both the WEF and WSF are not so much

policy-making institutions as discursive interventions, geared to concertising and coalescing political blocs, and to manifesting principles and values that can guide interstate and state authorities. Taken together, they constitute a clash of guiding principles framing the states-system. More generally, their role demonstrates the need for an approach that apprehends the co-constitutive international relations of states and non-state actors. Following Halliday ([2001](#)), to understand the role of non-state actors today we need a political sociology of state power rather than an international relations of state-ness. Such an approach offers us the critical scope we need to identify the over-arching or meta-antagonisms of international relations, and to highlight strategic fractures and sources of instability and transformation.

More than a decade on, Halliday's call for political sociology rings true. In the midst of a 'hydra-headed crisis' of global governance, the importance of MNCs and INGOs is, if anything, growing (Held et al. [2010](#)). If nothing else, the 2008–09 Global Financial Crisis and ensuing economic crisis demonstrated the power of the global financial sector to secure its interests at taxpayer expense (UNCTAD [2009](#)). The stasis in interstate governance in other fields – notably in climate change, security and food – opens the door to growing INGO influence, as a normative crisis envelops governing structures. The contest for influence is increasingly waged on this terrain, where states, together with MNCs and INGOs, are conduits for wider social forces and meta-conflicts.

## **Discussion questions**

**23.1** What are the similarities and differences between MNCs and INGOs?

**23.2** Have non-state actors shifted power away from states and the states-system?

**23.3** How do you explain the rise in number and influence of MNCs and INGOs?

**23.4** To what extent have MNCs influenced state economic management?

**23.5** To what extent have INGOs influenced the exercise of state power?

**23.6** How do MNCs and INGOs impact on the North–South divide?

### *Further reading*

Armstrong, David, Bello, Valeria, Gilson, Julia, and Spini, Debora (eds) 2011, *Civil society and international governance: The role of non-state actors in global and regional regulatory frameworks*, London: Routledge. *Explores the growing influence of NGOs and civil society on global and regional governance.*

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Centre for the Study of Global Governance 2001–, *Global civil society yearbook*, London: Sage. *Compiles commentary and data on the role of INGOs in global politics. Available at:*  
<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/globalGovernance/research/globalCivilSociety/publication>

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Higgott, Richard A., Underhill, Geoffrey R.D. and Bieler, Andreas (eds) 2000, *Non-state actors and authority in the global system*, London: Routledge. *A comprehensive collection on the range of non-state actors and their interaction with states in the global context.*

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International Labor Organization 2004, *Report of the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization*, Geneva: ILO. *A collection of papers on social aspects of globalisation, including the role of MNCs, housed under the heading 'Knowledge Networks' at:*  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/fairglobalization>.

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United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 1991–, *World investment report*, New York: United Nations. *Housed under the heading ‘Main publications’ at <http://www.unctad.org>. A mine of information on all aspects of MNCs, including their role in international politics.*

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United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 1990–, *Human development report*, New York: United Nations *An invaluable resource for debates on global issues affected by INGOs and MNCs. Available online at <http://hdr.undp.org/reports>.*

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World Social Forum: <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>. *The WSF Digital Repository contains a ‘Library of Alternatives’, effectively an archive of WSF perspectives since 2001.*

# Religion and secularism



**Elizabeth Shakman Hurd**

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## Introduction

This chapter introduces a new research program for understanding the politics of religion and [secularism](#). It argues that a focus on the politics of religion and secularism offers a productive port of entry into the study of international politics. Following a brief introduction to religion and International Relations (IR), it offers a basic historical introduction to the concept of secularism (see [Box 24.1](#)), explains why the politics of secularism is significant to the study of

global politics, and concludes with two short case studies of the politics of secularism in the Middle East and North Africa.

## **Religion and International Relations**

The study of the global dimensions and implications of religion and secularism is relatively new to the discipline of IR (Falk [2001](#); Hurd [2008](#); Katzenstein and Byrnes [2006](#); Petito and Hatzopoulos [2003](#); Thomas [2005](#)). The authority of different forms of secularism and the force they command in many parts of the world, within and between nation-states, has received little attention. There are a number of reasons for this lack of attention.

First and most significantly, questions of religion have been marginalised due to the sheer power and authority of secularism to define the terms of the debate in such a way that religion is understood (at best) as irrelevant to politics and (at worst) as an existential threat to rational public [order](#). Although this consensus has begun to shift in recent years (Hurd [2015](#)), it has been so powerful in IR and in the world that for many years even questioning it was considered nonsensical. The conviction that religion should be privatised – and that particular religions may threaten this process more than others – cuts to the core of modern political thought and practice. The privatisation of religion is ‘mandated ideologically by [liberal](#) categories of thought which permeate not only political ideologies and constitutional [theories](#) but the entire structure of modern Western thought’ (Casanova [1994](#): 215). As a foundational principle of modern politics, secularisation is often seen as having contributed to democratisation and liberalisation. In Europe and its settler colonies (the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and so on), [secularist settlements](#) of the relation between religion and politics are associated with notions of the public

interest, public good, freedom, toleration, justice and legitimacy. Secularist laws, traditions, institutions and sensibilities provide ‘a set of parameters, focal points, or even points of contention around which political discourse revolves’ (Bukovansky [2002](#): 25). They facilitate closure and agreement around received cultural, political and legal settlements of the relation between religion and politics.

Secularism, it turns out, is a powerful ‘pattern of political rule’ (Asad [2006](#): 219). Secularist settlements are sustained by a variety of assumptions, including secularisation as the most recent step in the worldly realisation of Christian or Judaeo-Christian morality; secularisation as the natural evolution toward a universal morality that has transcended the need for metaphysical moorings; secularisation as a commendable side-effect of democratisation and economic and political modernisation; and secularisation as the triumphant [globalisation](#) of a modern states-system in which religion has been privatised. Although jostling with each other for supremacy, and sometimes colliding head on, these powerful narratives and projects serve to produce and to manage religious diversity, imbue [state](#) interest and [identity](#) with meaning, secure an image of the contemporary international order as modern, secular and [democratic](#), and normalise particular religions and religious actors as either fit or unfit for participation in politics within and beyond the state.

### **Box 24.1: Terminology**

#### **Key concepts**

***Secularism:*** A doctrine and pattern of rule involving the definition and management of religion in the public sphere that is often intended to deprive religion of practical, political effects. While the meaning of secularism has changed over

time, the dominant contemporary meaning – which emerged in the nineteenth century – refers to a movement aimed at cultivating spheres of social and political life without references to (often though not exclusively Christian understandings of) a deity or the afterlife.

***Secularist settlement:*** A mode of containing, managing, remaking and reforming religion in a manner consistent with secularist agendas. Challenges the idea that secularism is a fixed, final achievement of modernity; instead viewing it as a historically and politically contingent attempt to define and manage the relationship between politics and religion.

Like everyone else, most IR scholars in Europe and its settler colonies have been subject to this powerful secularist consensus. As a result, a number of assumptions about religion have been taken for granted. One is that there are two kinds of religion: ‘good’ and ‘bad’. ‘Good’ religion is associated with a modern ideal subject who has interiorised religion as a set of privately held beliefs that are largely irrelevant to politics. Good religion, in short, is privatised religion. ‘Bad’ religion is associated with the violent history of Europe’s past, particularly the sectarian violence of the Wars of Religion during the European Reformation and afterwards, and, increasingly today, with [terrorism](#). Most [realist](#), liberal, [constructivist](#) and [English School](#) approaches to IR have picked up on these working definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ religion, and adapted them to their theoretical paradigms. Consequently, most operate on the assumption that ‘good’ religion is that which has been confined to the private sphere or has disappeared altogether, while ‘bad’ religion is that which obstinately refuses the terms of this

confinement. More recent contributions to the study of religion in world politics have put a slightly different spin on this by seeking to marginalise ‘bad’ religion, associating it with division, violence and intolerance, while attempting to resuscitate ‘good’ religion and ensure its proper place in international politics and public life as a contributor to global justice, engineer of [peacebuilding](#) and post-conflict reconciliation, and countervailing force to terrorism (Sisk [2011](#); Toft et al. [2011](#); Wilson [2010](#); for a critique, see Hurd [2015](#)).

A second reason for the lack of attention to religion in the field of IR is that both structuralist and materialist approaches to IR view religion (whether ‘good’ or ‘bad’) as largely epiphenomenal, meaning that religion is seen as an effect of or cover for more fundamental material considerations, including economic interest and [power politics](#). As Talal Asad ([1993](#): 46) has observed, materialist approaches such as [Marxism](#) ([Chapter 4](#)) dismiss religion as ‘a mode of consciousness which is other than consciousness of reality, external to the relations of production, producing no knowledge, but expressing at once the anguish of the oppressed and a spurious consolation’. Structuralist approaches such as [neo-realism](#) ([Chapter 3](#)) on the other hand tend to proceed on the assumption that states have fixed interests and that state behaviour is constrained by international structure defined by material factors such as the distribution of [power](#), technology and geography. In both cases, secularism and religion are viewed as ideologies that are essentially ‘contingent upon, and thus reducible to, material configurations of power or resources’ (Bukovansky [2002](#): 19). Religion, in other words, is epiphenomenal.

A third and final reason for the marginalisation of religion in IR is that questions of religion and secularism tend to fall just beyond the peripheral vision of the [empiricist](#) and [positivist](#) methods that have dominated mainstream political science for several decades. Consequently, these questions have only more recently been subject to more critical analysis (see Hurd [2008](#)) as the

discipline has opened up to cross-disciplinary work that involves a sustained engagement with the contemporary study of religion.

In today's globalising world, to take at face value secularist assumptions about the nature of 'good' and 'bad' religion, the terms and status of religion's alleged privatisation and/or its role as merely a cover for material interests is no longer an option. In a world of diverse foundational commitments, to dismiss 'religion' or the 'religious' in this way is to miss or misconstrue some of the most interesting and important political developments of our time. And the same must be said for secularism: to take 'secularism' as a given, or as merely the absence of religion, is to miss or misconstrue an important part of the story of contemporary world politics. Secularism and religion are co-[constitutive](#) concepts – you can't have one without the other. The study of religion, secularism and world politics requires grappling with not one but many varieties of secularism, and not one but many conceptions of religion.

As this paradigm shift takes hold, the presumed or desired separation of 'religion' and 'politics' can no longer be taken for granted. Rather, social scientists now speak of secularist 'settlements': powerful and evolving religio-political, legal and institutional patterns and practices with diverse and contested histories, inflected by local, national and global forces. No longer seen as fixed and final achievements of European-inspired modernity, these settlements are now understood as modes of managing, remaking and reforming religion (Cady and Hurd [2010](#)) to conform to particular demands of modern governance. In this new research program, concepts and practices associated with the secular and the religious are relationally defined and understood to assume disparate meanings and associations across time and space. It assumes a world in which the complex public roles of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and other traditions, and their relations to secularity and secularism, are questions to be asked anew by scholars of politics rather than settled histories to be explored in other disciplines. Social

scientists are responding to these developments by historicising and politicising the categories of the secular and the religious (Calhoun et al. [2011](#)). Secularisms are patterns of political rule with their own complex and contested political histories and implications. Failure to acknowledge this has led to a selective blindness in the study of world politics, as the blanket usage of the categories ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ has masked the complex politics surrounding claims to secularism, secularisation, secular democracy, secular human rights and related concepts. This chapter provides a framework for addressing these issues.

## **History of a concept: Secularism**

While often perceived as static, the notion of the secular in Europe and its settler colonies has assumed a surprising and even conflicting range of meanings over time and across space. William E. Connolly ([1995](#): 189) describes the secular as having ‘emerged historically within North American and European Christian culture as a subordinate space in which the mundane and the material could be given due attention’. Within this broad definition, however, at least three distinct transformations have occurred in the meaning of the secular in Latin Christendom (now Western Europe). First, as early as the thirteenth century, ‘secular’ was used in English – usually with negative connotations – to distinguish clergy living in the wider world from those residing in monastic seclusion. Priests who withdrew from the world formed the religious clergy, while those who lived in the world formed the secular clergy (Casanova [1994](#): 13). Second, by the sixteenth century, the term had shed its affiliation with godlessness and the profane: ‘the word “secular” was flung into motion and used to describe a world thought to be in motion: to “secularise” meant to make someone or something secular – converting from ecclesiastical to civil use or

possession’ (Keane [2000](#): 6). At this time, to secularise meant to take possession of that which had been associated with the ecclesiastical. In the 1648 Treaty of [Westphalia](#), for instance, secularisation referred to the laicisation of church lands. Casanova describes this meaning of secularisation as the ‘passage, transfer, or relocation of persons, things, functions, meanings, and so forth, from their traditional location in the religious sphere to the secular spheres’ (Casanova [1994](#): 13). In a third transformation, from the nineteenth century onwards, secularism took on the meaning that it often has today in the vernacular, referring to a movement that was ‘expressly intended to provide a certain theory of life and conduct without reference to a deity or a future life’ (Tamimi [2000](#): 14). Modern secularists came to be associated with the marginalisation of (a particular Christian understanding of) religion – with the idea that the ‘Church and the world are caught up in an historical struggle in which slowly, irreversibly worldliness is getting the upper hand’ (Keane [2000](#): 7).

Secularist lines of demarcation between religion and politics are not only constantly evolving within states and societies, but also take different forms across societies. Adapting sociologist Craig Calhoun’s insight about [nationalism](#), secularism may be understood as ‘not the solution to the puzzle [of politics and religion] but the *discourse* within which struggles to settle the question are most commonly waged’ (Calhoun [1997](#): 76). Secularism is an authoritative discourse, or a ‘tradition of argumentation’ (Shotter [1993](#): 200). Secularising claims, projects and institutions produce authoritative definitions and settlements of religion and politics, while simultaneously claiming and striving to be exempt from this process of production. Secularism serves as a resource for collective mobilisation and legitimisation, and a language in which moral and political questions are contested. Like nationalism, it contributes to the consolidation of inclusionary and exclusionary group identities, whether at the global, national or [transnational](#) level. Secularising claims and projects both

rely upon, and help to produce, particular understandings of religion, of religious resurgence, of what is understood as ‘normal’ and ‘modern’ politics and so forth. Consider as an example the fact that one hears relatively few references to political Christianity, or political Judaism – these are subsumed for the most part under ‘normal politics’. Yet there is a great deal of anxiety about political Islam. This is due in part to the influence of particular secularist settlements, which carry within them deep-seated normative assumptions about particular religious traditions and histories (in this case, Islam) in relation to various modern forms of governance. This brings us to the question of world politics.

## **Secularism and world politics**

Most discussions in political science and IR presuppose a fixed definition of the secular and the religious, and proceed from there. Realist, liberal, English School, [feminist](#) and Marxist approaches to IR treat religion as either private by prior assumption, or as a unstable cultural relic to be handled gingerly or passed off to anthropologists or scholars of religion. Even constructivists have paid scant attention to these questions, focusing instead on the interaction of pre-existing state units to explain how international norms influence state interests and identity, or looking at the social construction of states and the states-system with the politics of religion left out of the picture.

This [disciplinary](#) convention fixes in advance key definitions and terms of inquiry, with some of the most vital aspects of contemporary world politics systematically excluded from consideration. The presumption that religion has been privatised and is no longer operative in modern politics, or that its influence can neatly be encapsulated in anthropological studies of a particular religious tradition and its influence (always from the outside) upon politics, has led IR

scholars to miss or misconstrue some of the most significant political developments of our time. This narrow vision is in part attributable to a rigid and dehistoricised approach to the ‘secular’ that pre-structures the academic fields of political science and IR. These fixed concepts patrol the borders of what counts as ‘politics’ or the ‘political’, what counts as ‘religion’ or ‘religious’, and how they relate to each other.

To be clear, it is not that the categories of the secular and the religious lack any analytical or political salience. They have shaped, and continue to shape, the world in which we live in profound ways. My contention is that these categories cannot be taken for granted in a globalised world, and that it is important to look closely at what is actually meant when they are used (see [Box 24.2](#)) or invoked, and how those uses and invocations shape both political and religious realities. This is necessary in order to account for the contingencies of these categories, for the power relations they obscure, reflect and reproduce, and for the histories that they carry with them into the present. Accepting these categories without interrogating them makes it difficult to see the shifting and contested relation of secularism not only to religion but also to other political phenomena cast in opposition to it. Failing to attend to the history and politics of secularism imposes a simplistic and distorted template on world politics by stabilising particular, historically contingent definitions of both secularism and religion. This makes life easier in the short run for social scientists looking for easy answers, but it is costly in a world in which these categories not only reflect particular political and religious histories but also, and simultaneously, shape and constrain social, legal and political practices, institutions and ways of being and living together in very specific ways.

#### **Box 24.2: Discussion points**

##### **The religious and the secular**

## The religious and the secular

Secularism is not the absence of religion. The secular and the religious are concepts that can only be defined in relation to each other, and so to talk about the 'secular' presumes an understanding of the 'religious'. But there is no consensus on the meaning of these key terms. The study of religion, secularism and IR therefore requires toggling back and forth, both relying on these terms while also acknowledging their instability and refusing all attempts to reify them. Those who assume that religion, secularism and politics are knowable and distinct entities should become progressively less secure in that assumption in the process of engaging with this field of study.

Interpreting global politics through the lens of the politics of secularism has at least six implications for the study of IR. First, there are different national varieties of secularism (Turkish Kemalism, French *laïcité* and American 'Judeo-Christian' secularism). Although they will often share family resemblances, each represents a contingent yet powerful and perduring political settlement of the relation between religion and politics (Hurd [2008](#)).

Second, secularist settlements are not fixed in stone. They are produced, contested and renegotiated through the law, political and religious practice, and other social relations – including international relations. Despite their contingency, particular forms of secularism often become so entrenched that they are perceived as exempt from this process of production. In other words, secularist settlements, like nationalist settlements, become 'naturalised'. They operate below the threshold of public debate and contestation. They are taken as given, and not made. Secularisation may be understood as the social and historical processes through which these settlements become authoritative,

legitimated and embedded in individuals, the law, the state and other societal relations.

Third, a focus on the politics of secularism offers a new understanding of the so-called return of religion to world politics by shifting the focus away from religious actors and institutions. Instead, the focus is on the politics involved in defining the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’, and on the social and political implications of those authoritative divisions. Forms of secularism that emerged from (and arguably still lie within) Latin Christendom differ from those that stand in relation to other traditions, including Islamic traditions, which have a long history of separation between civil and religious authorities. Multiple formations of secularism coexist in both Christian and Muslim-majority societies. Challenges to them are often described as ‘religious resurgence’: Kemalists in Turkey and laicists in France, for example, are no longer able to monopolise the public debate over what it means to be a secular state. Challengers to authoritative traditions of secularism are defined by those in power as ‘religious’ – hence the term ‘religious’ resurgence. Challenges to Kemalism in Turkey and to republican *laïcité* in France are parallel movements, and both form part of the politics of secularism. Similarly, debates over what it means to live in a Christian or post-Christian state are a perennial feature of US politics, and whether India is a Hindu, multi-religious or post-Hindu state is deeply contested. Religious resurgence, from the standpoint of the politics of secularism, is not simply a rise or return of ‘religion’ taken in a pre-defined way, but an acceleration of challenges to dominant secularist settlements and to the laws and institutions that underpin and sustain them. These movements, whether understood as ‘religious’ or not, contest particular secularist settlements of the relationship between religion, politics and the state (Hurd [2007](#)).

Fourth, insofar as they operate on the assumption that religion was privatised and rendered irrelevant to power politics after the Westphalian

settlement, realist, liberal and constructivist IR theories need to be reconsidered. As Peter Katzenstein (2006: 32–3) observes, ‘conventional renderings of the historical origins of the modern European state system and religious politics are intellectually suspect ... Religion continues to lurk underneath the veneer of European secularization’. Modern secularist practices and ways of life emerged within a Westphalian moral order that continued to be shaped and influenced in profound ways by Christian histories, beliefs, ways of ordering public and private, social practices, and legal norms and institutions. This history makes it impossible to subsume the current international order into realist and liberal frameworks that assume that religion has simply been privatised. Put differently, modern forms of secularism contribute to the constitution of a particular idea and practice of state [sovereignty](#) that claims to be universal by defining the limits of [state-centred](#) politics with ‘religion’ on the outside. To delimit the terms and boundaries of the political by defining religion as a private counterpart to politics, however, is a historically variable and always contestable political claim. Modern European and American forms of secularism perpetuate this claim about the limits of modern politics, operating beneath the threshold of public debate, yet deeply implicated in the politics of sovereign authority.

Fifth, studying the global politics of secularism involves having a second look at the theological and philosophical foundations, and the universalising pretensions, of [international law](#), international order and international [human rights](#). Although the aspiration to secular neutrality sounds laudable to most [Enlightenment](#)-trained ears, it is more complex than is apparent at first glance. The assumption that global political institutions and practices – particularly those that claim to be universal or universalisable, such as international human rights – are equipped to distinguish unambiguously between the religious and the political is a controversial one. In defining the secular, secularists assign a place for something else, which is designated as religious. Casanova (1994: 20) notes

that ‘the secular, as a concept, only makes sense in relation to its counterpart, the religious’. Given this conceit, we might ask: What would a politics look like that claimed *neither* to transcend religious and cultural particularity (as in most liberal internationalist claims to the secular) *nor* to identify the only possible source of order in a single religious or cultural heritage (as in many forms of politicised religion)? What would happen if one were to begin with the premise that there is no basic authority, command or contract that must be placed above questioning for ethical life to proceed? (Connolly [2002](#): xix). To escape the cycle of violence on both sides of the secular–religious divide, it may be necessary to break ‘both with a secularism that seeks to confine faith to the private realm and with a theo-centered vision that seeks to unite people behind one true faith’ (Connolly [2002](#): 16).

Finally, claims to the secular and secularism in Europe, the Middle East, North America and elsewhere cannot be understood without reference to European and global history, particularly [colonial](#) and [imperial](#) history. This is a point at which I part ways with Charles Taylor’s ([2007](#)) argument in *A Secular Age* – for me, the politics of secularism cannot be understood in isolation from this global historical context. Secularisms are created through actions, habits, beliefs and ways of being in the world, and cannot be abstracted from the specific global historical contexts and circumstances in which they were created, and in which Europe has played a crucial global role in recent centuries. While on the one hand French *laïcité* emerged out of and remains indebted to the Enlightenment critique of religion and Christian reform, for example, on the other it has been constituted through imperial relationships, including colonial relations in North Africa and the Middle East, and negative and often racialised representations of Islam and Muslims. The next section offers a glimpse of the global and imperial power dynamics involving the politics of secularism in Tunisia and Iran.

# **The politics of secularism in the Middle East and North Africa**

The politics of secularism in the Middle East and North Africa is a complex and varied story involving interactions between global and local forms of separation and accommodation; the cooptation of authoritarian secularist discourse by leaders in search of power; colonial and post-colonial politics and history; and religious politics of staggering variety. In conceptual terms, the turn to this region offers a window onto the extraordinary complexities that come with using a term that emerged out of predominantly Christian Europe's religious and political history but that has circulated globally – and been dramatically reinterpreted according to local circumstances – in non-Christian majority contexts. Daunting though this may seem, there is no choice but to grapple with the globalisation of secularity because particular Christian, now largely post-Christian, categories (namely, 'secular' and 'religious') have become globalised, hybridised and transformed through interactions with other societies. According to Casanova ([2012](#): 27), 'the very fact that the same category of religion is being used globally across cultures and civilizations testifies to the global expansion of the modern secular–religious system of classification of reality which first emerged in the modern Christian West'. Given this state of affairs, Europe is 'both indispensable and inadequate' (Chakrabarty [2000](#): 6). In other words, European conceptions of secularism and secularisation are both indispensable and inadequate to the task of understanding non-European forms of modernity and trajectories of secularisation (Davison [2006](#): 388–9).

A brief introduction to the politics of secularism in Tunisia and Iran illustrates the capacity of discourses of secularism and secularisation to assume dramatically different meanings in different contexts, and offers a glimpse of the global and imperial power dynamics that are part and parcel of the politics of

secularism. I do not claim to offer a comprehensive schedule of religio-political separation or accommodation in the Middle East and North Africa. What it means to be *laiklik* in Turkey differs from what it means to be *laic* in France or secular in the United States. There is no agreement as to the proper translation of the term ‘secularism’ into Arabic: it is sometimes translated as *ilmaniyah* (from *ilm*, science) or as *alamaniyah* (from *alam*, world). Others argue that it is more accurately rendered by *dunyawiyah*, or worldly, mundane and temporal (Tamimi [2000](#): 13). Rather, my aim is to illustrate how secularist political discourses and national-cultural projects encumbered by their association with Western imperial power took shape in two different contexts.

Both President Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia and the Shah of Iran adopted forms of state-sponsored secularisation to entrench their domestic power while maintaining the allegiance of powerful Western allies. Both leaders developed and imposed national-cultural projects that involved explicit reference to the need to imitate what were perceived as ‘Western’ secularist settlements, including a public, state-sponsored marginalisation of Islam. These narratives and governing strategies were later picked up by oppositional Islamists and used as an indictment of enforced privatisation of Islam, autocratic state power and tacit support for European and American [hegemony](#) in the Middle East. Given these associations, it is hardly surprising that secularisation was widely unpopular in these two countries at that particular historical conjuncture. In the Tunisian case, it was the secular autocrats who ultimately prevailed – at least in the short term – while in Iran it was their opponents.

## **Tunisia**

European forms of secularism emerged for the most part indigenously within Europe – largely, though not exclusively, out of internal disputes within

Christianity between different denominations. In Tunisia, secularisation was from the beginning a state-sponsored political project with a very different political valence. In the Middle East and North Africa, the politics of secularism intensified in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of increasing interactions with Europe, in which both the 'crown' and the 'cross' weighed heavily. The study of the politics of secularism in this region therefore requires particular attention to colonial and post-colonial influences, without assuming that this context is the only relevant one. Like global modernity in general, processes of secularisation in the region are both related to Europe and also developed in distinctive ways in the Middle East (Abu-Lughod [1998](#): 22).

In Tunisia, secularisation became associated with the attempt by a powerful state to denigrate local conceptions of community and authority in the name of centralised state power, in support of Western interests. Under the leadership of Habib Bourguiba (r. 1956–87) and backed by Western governments, Tunisia's post-independence government pursued an aggressive program of state-imposed secularisation. The government abolished the *sharia* courts, closed the Zaytouna (a renowned centre of Muslim learning), banned the headscarf for women and debilitated the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) (Esposito [1999](#): 161). It was clear that 'for Bourguiba, Islam represented the past; the West was Tunisia's only hope for a modern future' (Esposito [1999](#): 161).

These developments led to the formation of the oppositional Islamic Tendency Movement (Renaissance Party), led by Rashid Ghannouchi. Though initially an apolitical cultural society, the group's status changed in January 1978 when President Bourguiba used the military to crush protesters associated with the group. Combined with the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, this 'convinced Ghannouchi and the movement of the need to move beyond broad ideological statements and relate Islam directly and specifically to the real, everyday political, economic, and social problems of the people' (Esposito [1999](#):

164–5). Ghannoushi hence became the leader of the more overtly politicised Islamic Association (*Jamaah al-Islamiyya*), which developed the concept of a ‘living Islam’ concerned with wages, poverty, workers’ rights and national and cultural identity. Two years later, in 1981, Ghannoushi’s Islamic Association became a political party, the MTI (Islamic Tendency Movement). Bourguiba refused to issue a licence legalising the MTI, a decision described by one analyst as a fatal political error:

The brutality of Bourguiba’s response to any and all opposition and the restrictive policies of his government alienated many Tunisians ... MTI proved effective in attracting many of the disaffected, not only students, workers, and union members but also middle-class professionals, professors, teachers, engineers, lawyers, scientists, and doctors.

(Esposito [1999](#): 166)

In 1981, Bourguiba cracked down on the MTI, imprisoning and torturing Ghannoushi and other leaders. Although Ghannoushi was released in 1984 in response to popular pressure, severe repression of Islamic groups, customs, symbols and traditions continued, followed by another violent crackdown in 1987. The MTI became increasingly radicalised as a result, with the government using the excuse of a [fundamentalist](#) threat to cement their hold on state power and to shun political liberalisation. Bourguiba’s replacement, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, likewise refused to allow the MTI to participate in public life. Ben Ali, who was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011 after being overthrown in a popular uprising, cited a ‘firm belief in the need not to mix religion and politics, as experience has shown that anarchy emerges and the rule of law and institutions is undermined when such a mixing takes place’ (cited in Esposito [1999](#): 170).

Yet the MTI did not seek to establish a militant Islamic state. Instead, it called for ‘a reassertion of Tunisia’s Islamic-Arabic way of life and values,

restriction of Tunisia's Westernised (Francophile) profile, and promotion of democracy, political pluralism, and economic and social justice' (Esposito [1999](#): 166). However, leaders acting in the name of the secular state classified MTI alongside pro-Iranian groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah and banned it, despite its legitimacy among the Tunisian people and its progressive nationalist agenda. In this case, the modernising autocratic state prevailed – at least until Ben Ali was forced out by the Tunisian people in 2011 as a result of the corruption, economic mismanagement and political repression associated with his regime.

### **Iran**

Iranian political history offers an interesting counterpoint to the Tunisian experience because in this case opponents of the modernising autocratic state prevailed, at least in the first instance. In Iran under the Shah and his father Reza Shah (r. 1925–41), secularism became a legitimising principle for the suppression of Islamic thought and practice. A state-centric model of imposed modernisation sought to excise Iran's Islamic heritage in favour of what was portrayed by the Iranian government as Western and pre-Islamic political traditions (Mirsepassi [2000](#)). The discourse of secularisation was associated with the US attempt, through the proxy rule of the Shah, to take possession of Iran economically, politically and culturally in the name of US economic (namely, oil) and political interests (namely, support during the [Cold War](#) and support for Israel).

Widespread popular opposition to the Shah culminated in the Iranian revolution of 1978–79. Revolutionaries of strikingly disparate political persuasions – who might be labelled secular, religious or perhaps neither – all sought to refashion the Shah's state-imposed secularist settlement. The Iranian

[revolution](#) was not simply a religious backlash against secular modernity, as is often portrayed. It was a challenge to the *specific* form of secularisation and modernisation undertaken by the ruling regime, rather than to ‘secularism’ in general, and a response to the economic and cultural dislocation set in motion by that regime’s policies. Specifically, the Shah had become associated with Western interference in Iran’s internal affairs, and the unthinking and undemocratic hegemony of Western ways of organising political and religious life. As one analyst put it, ‘the goal of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, then, was not only to free Iranians politically from the Shah but also to liberate them conceptually from Western ways of thinking’ (Juergensmeyer [1993](#): 19).

Rather than an attempt to return to a fixed and ahistoric form of Islamic governance, the revolution sought to overturn and renegotiate the prevailing state-sponsored secularist settlement, perceived as connected to illegitimate and culturally distant outside economic and political interests. After the revolution, many Iranians favoured a non-dogmatic and non-hegemonic tradition of secularism or separationism legitimised through reference to Islamic tradition. They called for a politics that was neither ‘secular’ in the Shah’s impositional sense, nor ‘religious’ in the theocratic sense espoused by Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers, who ultimately triumphed. It is important to note that Khomeini’s blueprint for Islamic governance was in fact a dramatic departure from Shia theories and traditions of governance; at the time of the revolution, Iran had no direct historical precedent for governance by the clergy: ‘The basis for Khomeini’s theory of Islamic governance – the guardianship of the religious jurist (*veliyet-e faqih*) – rests on a novel and almost unprecedented reinterpretation of religious canon that continues to be contested by senior theologians’ (Maloney [2002](#): 98). The Iranian revolution thus replaced an imperial form of secular modernity with an imperial form of religious modernity – the ‘rule of the jurisconsult’. It was a shift ‘from temporal to theocratic

absolutism' (Arjomand [1988](#): 89–174). This rejection of Western interference in Iran's internal politics and the West's bid for cultural and political hegemony 'signified the emergence of a new political sociability and the dominance of a new political discourse' in which 'imperialist domination of Islamicate societies was seen to have been achieved not through military or economic supremacy, as earlier generations of nationalists and socialists had argued, but through the undermining of religion and culture mediated through women' (Najmabadi [2008](#): 41).

### **Beyond the politics of 'secular versus religious'**

Not all claims to the secular or secularisation in the Middle East and North Africa – or elsewhere, for that matter – have served as a front for authoritarian state power, cooperation with the West or the marginalisation of Islam. There are many variations and projects of secularization that are as diverse in their foundations as they are in their political and religious expressions (see [Box 24.3](#)). Understanding the politics of secularism requires attention to how the secular and the religious are mobilised by specific actors in particular contexts. Not all of these contexts involve state power. For example, a variety of pietist movements throughout the region have attempted to ethically socialise pious subjects, playing a large role in public Islam but working almost exclusively beyond the purview of the state (Mahmood [2005](#)). In addition, European imperial power has involved more than simply the violent imposition or sponsorship through proxy of European-style secularism. A focus on the politics of secularism in relation to the projection of imperial and colonial power and authority is not meant to exclude other dimensions of these histories, but to call attention to the significance of the politics of secularism as partly constitutive of national and global politics, including imperial politics. It is also worth

mentioning the many religio-political discourses circulating in the region that resemble neither Bourguiba's Tunisia nor Iran under the Shah. Such alternative approaches to navigating and negotiating relations between religion and politics have often sought to move beyond and operate outside of politicised divisions between 'secularist' and 'Islamist'. An example is the writing of Iranian scholar and philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush, who draws explicitly upon resources within Islamic tradition to legitimise forms of separation between religious and political authorities (Soroush [2002](#)). Another example is a particular strand of feminist activism in Iran that has refigured the restrictive terms of the 'secular versus Islamic' oppositional binary (Najmabadi [2008](#)). Criticising those who insist upon a rigid Islamic-versus-secular divide, Najmabadi concludes:

Those who resist and oppose this totalizing outlook have every stake in resisting not only the specific lines being drawn as to what constitutes Islam and what un-Islam, what is secular and what is religious, but the very notion of drawing any lines that would demarcate a religious domain from a secular domain.

(Najmabadi [2008](#): 43)

The recent histories of Tunisia and Iran point to the complexity and contestation surrounding how these lines are drawn, by whom and in whose interests. They indicate that particular material and imperial interests are often deeply imbricated in the politics of secularism. Secularisation in the Middle East and North Africa is not only a Western power play or an imperial imposition, but rather a plural set of competing discourses and governing practices that evoke different histories and legitimise different forms of polity and politics in specific national and regional contexts. Scholars and analysts need to be attentive to these distinctions.

**Box 24.3:** Discussion points

### **Popular revolutions 2011**

The revolutions in the Middle East that began in 2011 produced, at least momentarily, new political openings in which relations between Islam, politics and public life were open for renegotiation. These were neither 'Islamic' nor 'secularist' revolutions, but popular democratic revolts against authoritarian regimes, many of which enjoyed the support of Western governments. Part of the task of creating more democratic societies included opening space for a broader range of political parties, many of whom (like the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian case) had been outlawed by leaders such as former Egyptian President Mubarak.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to bring into focus a paradigm shift in the study of religion and world politics. The black box of secularism had remained closed due to the conviction that modernisation theorists had long ago resolved the question of religion and politics. This chapter has opened that box by removing the theoretical and conceptual blinders that insist there is only one secularism and not many, and by acknowledging the simultaneous indispensability and inadequacy of European religions, history and politics when it comes to understanding the politics of secularism on a global scale. This clears a path for new responses to the vexing questions raised by a pluralising world in which religions have always been and most likely will remain significant in public life, politics and global institutions. Yet much work remains to be done.

The study of religion, secularism and international relations requires a suspension of (dis)belief (E.S. Hurd [2011](#)). It requires a suspension of belief in

the ‘secular’ or ‘secularism’ as the uninterrogated ground and *sine qua non* of modern politics and public order, and attention to how secularising claims and projects come to be what they are, and do what they do, in different contexts. This means framing research questions that do not presume a particular understanding of the ‘secular’ or the ‘religious’, and that remain attentive to the power relations, histories, struggles and even violence that take place under the heading of the secular. This can be uncomfortable for those socialised in European and American forms of secularism, which are kept afloat by a high degree of certainty, stability and even comfort. Approaching the secular and religious relationally, as unstable, historically contingent theological and political constructs, allows the ground to shift in interesting ways.

And the ground *is* shifting. Developments in late modern world politics, including an increasing cultural pluralism within societies, rising global [interdependence](#), the questioning of the presumed superiority of the religio-political legacies of Latin Christendom and a rise in forms of political solidarity that defy and transcend the secular-religious binary demand a rethinking of the basic terms of inquiry (secular rational versus religious irrational; philosophical versus theological; reason versus faith; secular law versus religious law) that have structured much of the scholarship on this subject. Scholars need to pose research questions that do not presuppose fixed definitions of these terms or relations between them. Doing so opens the door to new perspectives on power, authority and history – and not just religion – in international and comparative politics.

## **Discussion questions**

**24.1** What are some of the contentious issues involving the politics of secularism where you live?

**24.2** If you wanted to learn more about the global and comparative politics of secularism, which states or non-state actors or organisations do you think would be most interesting to study, and why?

**24.3** What is the role of international courts such as the European Court of Human Rights in adjudicating issues involving the politics of secularism and religion? What other international institutions are involved in these issues, and how do their actions shape the lives of those subject to these institutions?

**24.4** In what ways do the politics of race, class, gender and sexuality intersect with the politics of secularism and religion?

**24.5** How does globalisation, including its economic, political, cultural, demographic, spiritual and technological dimensions, affect the ways in which secularism is embodied and contested in different locations?

**24.6** How do international human rights actors and organisations, such as Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, approach questions involving secularism, religion and religious difference?

**24.7** What sources would you use to study the politics of secularism and religion? Policy statements? International treaties? Speeches? Legal decisions? Opinion polls? Government reports? Academic conference proceedings? Popular culture? All of the above?

**24.8** What are the implications of rethinking the politics of secularism for the use of concepts such as sectarianism, religious freedom and religious violence to explain conflict or coexistence in IR?

*Further reading*

### Further reading

Bender, Courtney and Klassen, Pamela E. 2010, *After pluralism: Reimagining religious engagement*, New York: Columbia University Press. *Interrogates the concept of religious pluralism as a solution to issues posed by religious difference.*

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# Global economic institutions



**Marc Williams**

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## Introduction

This chapter explores the role of three global economic institutions (GEIs) in contemporary economic governance: the International Monetary Fund, (IMF), the World Bank and the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#). The impact of GEIs on states and societies is complex, and widely varying assessments of the performance of these organisations can be found in the literature. The first

section of the chapter discusses global governance and globalisation, and examines competing perspectives on international organisations given the absence of theoretical consensus on the roles and functions of international economic organisations. Controversies over the role of the GEIs in the global economy have focused on the economic impact of their activities and their representative nature as institutions of governance. The second section of the chapter explores the historical evolution of the IMF, World Bank and WTO as they have adapted to the challenges of an evolving global economy. In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), there has been renewed speculation concerning the continuing relevance of key international economic institutions. The third section of the chapter therefore focuses on key challenges facing the GEIs in the wake of the GFC.

The three global economic institutions discussed in this chapter owe their existence to the creation of a multilateral economic order after the end of World War II. This commitment to a multilateral order based on liberal economic principles has been called into question since the GFC. It has been argued that multilateral institutions and the aspirations for them have not matched the pace of global change or new rationales for multilateral engagement emerging from global challenges (Adams and Luchsinger [2012](#): 10). In this context, it is pertinent to note that the heads of key global economic institutions have intervened in this debate. For example Pascal Lamy, then the Director-General of the WTO, warned in 2012 that

multilateralism is at a crossroads. Either it advances in the spirit of shared values and enhanced cooperation, or we will face a retreat from multilateralism, at our own peril. Without global cooperation on finance, security, trade, the environment and poverty reduction, the risks of division, strife and war will remain dangerously real.

(Lamy [2012](#))

More recently, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde claimed, ‘A retreat from globalisation and multilateralism is a serious risk at a time when international cooperation and coordination are as critical as ever’ (Lagarde [2016](#)). Debates on the ability of the IMF, World Bank and WTO to prevent global economic crises or facilitate solutions to collective action problems are intertwined with debates on the future of multilateralism more generally.

This chapter focuses on the World Bank, IMF and WTO – arguably the most important GEIs in contemporary international relations. In order to understand the activities of these institutions and the controversies surrounding them, it is necessary to look both at their historical evolution and at the various ways in which writers analyse international organisations.

## **Global governance and the global economy**

There are, of course, many definitions of the term ‘global governance’. For the purposes of this chapter, governance will be taken to refer to ‘collective efforts to identify, understand, or address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacities of individual states to solve’ (Weiss [2013b](#): 32). In other words, global governance is the system of governance mechanisms (institutions, rules, norms and regimes) designed to regulate human affairs in the world (O’Brien and Williams [2016](#): 299). From this, it follows that global governance is not simply a technical or functional term, but inescapably contains a normative element. Key questions pertaining to control over decision-making and the content of rules and norms are central to understanding global economic governance. Any analysis of GEIs as key actors in global economic governance must therefore be sensitive to power and purpose. While the World Bank, IMF and WTO are now inescapable features of the international economic landscape, permanent global economic

institutions are a relatively recent historical creation that can be traced to the political and economic settlement at the end of World War II.

As World War II drew to a close, the UN Monetary and Financial Conference was held in July 1944 at [Bretton Woods](#), New Hampshire. This conference laid the foundations for the postwar international economic order. At the Bretton Woods conference, two organisations were formed: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which was later popularly called the World Bank, and the IMF. These two organisations were meant to be two parts of a tripartite structure of international economic organisations that would provide the foundations for postwar recovery and prosperity. The third part of the economic architecture scheduled to be created at the Havana Conference on Trade and Employment in November 1947 never came to fruition. Although the delegates agreed to form an International Trade Organization (ITO), this institution never came into existence since the charter of the ITO was never ratified. With the failure of the ITO, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) became a forum for the reduction of tariffs and for international trade policy until it was replaced in 1995 by the WTO.

The rationale for the creation of a multilateral economic order underpinned with formal institutions lay in three considerations. First, many policy-makers believed that one of the major causes of the war was the economic instability of the 1930s (Calleo and Rowland [1973](#): 35–7). The international economic system experienced a number of shocks in the inter-war period, including the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the Great Depression of the 1930s and a breakdown in international economic cooperation. These policy-makers believed that the rise of fascism, Nazism and militarism in the 1930s was a direct result of economic instability and economic rivalry. They therefore set out to establish an economic framework that would provide a firm foundation upon which to build a peaceful

postwar world. Second, policy-makers believed that an open trading system and a stable monetary and financial system were essential prerequisites for the recovery of European economies devastated by the war. Third, policy-makers established an economic system based on what has been termed ‘embedded liberalism’ – that is, compromise between state intervention to secure domestic markets and liberal economic principles (Ruggie [1982](#)).

While there is no single answer to the question of whether we need global economic institutions, since the end of World War II leading governments have answered this question in the affirmative. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the positive answer to this question was conditioned by their experience of the Great Depression, war and the challenge of reconstruction. In the contemporary world, the positive answer to this question is framed in relation to globalisation (Higgott [2012](#)).

The GFC of 2008–09 was the most severe downturn experienced by credit markets since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Collyns [2008](#)). In turn, the GFC sparked a global economic recession as economic output fell. It was apparent from the outset that individual nations could not return to economic prosperity through reliance on their own economic measures. In other words, both national and international action was necessary to repair the damage wrought by the GFC. One major innovation in the area of global governance was the rise of the Group of 20 (G20) and, while the implications of the shift from the **G8** to the **G20** certainly mark an important evolution in the institutionalisation of global economic governance (Beeson and Bell [2009](#); Helleiner and Pagliari [2009](#)), the global economic crisis also served to highlight the resilience of the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO to contemporary global governance (Drezner [2015](#)).

While recognising that globalisation remains a contested term, with disputes taking place not only over its meaning but also over its very existence

(Scholte [2005](#)), no better concept exists that captures the profound changes that have taken place in economic, political, social and cultural dimensions of society. Arguably, globalisation is not a recent phenomenon, and many facets of economic interdependence and trans-border communication are not novel. However, contemporary globalisation is distinct from other historical forms of the phenomenon. There are three key features of contemporary globalisation. First, central to contemporary globalisation is a ‘widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness’ (Held et al. [1999](#): 2). Second, and linked to the idea of global interconnectedness, is the notion that globalisation is a multidimensional affair covering economic, political, social, technological, ecological and cultural dimensions of social life. Third, globalisation is inclusive of both material and ideational/normative dimensions. Globalisation refers not simply to changes in material structures and processes, but also to ideological and ethical issues. This threefold approach suggests that globalisation is a set of processes rather than an end-state and highlights the contested nature of the debate concerning global governance as a response to the pressures created by globalisation.

Globalisation is an uneven process, and therefore it poses both challenges and opportunities for the global economy and global economic institutions (Woods [1999](#): 25–34). On one hand, global economic interdependence is a process that brings national economies closer together, thus requiring better coordination and harmonisation of policies (UNDP [2005](#)). On the other hand, globalisation unleashes forces that appear to speed up the processes whereby the gap between winners and losers in the world economy widens more quickly (Wade [2004](#)) and with more serious consequences than at previous times. GEIs are thus faced with the task of ameliorating these adverse consequences of globalisation. These challenges have been central to the higher profile that GEIs have experienced over the past decade.

Frequently, globalisation is confused or conflated with a particular type of economic policy, namely neoliberalism. However, neoliberal economic policy is one response to globalisation, and not the only available mix of economic policies. Neoliberal economic policies, in this context, refer to policies supportive of market solutions to economic problems, increased emphasis on the private sector, a lessening of government intervention in the economy and a reduction in welfare provisions. Many of the critics of the GEIs focus on their role as instruments in the spread of economic liberal ideas and strategies. In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and IMF adopted a neoliberal approach known as the [Washington Consensus](#) (see [Box 25.1](#)). While the Washington Consensus no longer dominates international policy-making, it is an expression of the neoliberal turn in economic thought, which remains relevant to contemporary global decision-making. But before we examine the contested record of the GEIs, it is necessary to take a brief look at contrasting perspectives on international organisation since assessment of the possibilities and limitations of GEIs is conditioned by the perspective held by the analyst.

#### **Box 25.1: Terminology**

##### **The Washington Consensus**

The Washington Consensus is a term coined by the economist John Williamson. It refers to a set of policies designed to foster economic development that had broad support among officials and economists in the US Government (especially the US Treasury), IMF and World Bank. Although Williamson's original thesis applied solely to Latin America, the term has been given wider applicability. These policies included fiscal discipline (balancing budgets), liberalising trade, freeing exchange rates and interest rates, privatising state industries, deregulation, tax

reform to broaden the tax base, redirecting public expenditure to increase economic returns and redistribute income, and securing property rights.

## **Perspectives on global economic institutions**

While there are numerous questions that scholars and practitioners pose concerning the role played by GEIs in global governance, these can be seen to be variations on two central questions: Are GEIs important? And whose interests are served by GEIs? These two questions contain both positive and normative components – that is, they embrace both issues relating to what has been accomplished by these organisations and also issues surrounding the goals or purposes of these bodies. Views about GEIs are related to beliefs about international cooperation and international organisation more generally (Pease [2016](#)). **Liberal** theories have been dominant in approaches to thinking about international organisation because liberal theories take international organisation seriously – unlike **realist** theories, with their emphasis on state behaviour (see [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#)). For liberals, there are a number of core assumptions that lead them to think that GEIs are important. First, liberals believe that international cooperation is a rational response to an interdependent world economy (Rittberger and Zangl [2006](#): 16–20) (see [Chapter 2](#)). Liberals believe that states are rational actors, and they thus see GEIs as a rational response to the complexities of international economic transactions. No single state can secure its economic goals in an interdependent world economy, and therefore mutual vulnerabilities will lead states to create GEIs. Second, liberals believe international cooperation on the basis of reciprocity increases mutual gains for all parties (Karns and Mingst [2010](#): 37). Thus GEIs can benefit all members,

since they promote efficiency and stability in the world economy. While liberals provide positive answers to both questions realists tend to take the opposite view.

All forms of realism take the state as the basic and most important unit in IR (see [Chapter 3](#)). Thus, from a realist perspective, GEIs are only important to the extent that they serve the interests of the states that created them in the first place. Because international organisations are viewed from this focus on power, realists will tend to argue that international organisations will reflect the interests of the dominant states (Waltz [2000](#): 26). Therefore a GEI will serve the interests of the most powerful state in the organisation.

From a constructivist perspective (see [Chapter 7](#)), international organisations can be important and independent actors in international relations (Barnett and Finnemore [2004](#)). Constructivists focus on norms and identity formation, and from this perspective GEIs both reflect the normative consensus underlying their creation and influence their members through changing their beliefs and understandings and shaping their behaviour (Karns and Mingst [2010](#): 50–2). While there is no settled view on the interest served by GEIs, the dominant liberal constructivist view focuses on the dissemination of liberal norms (Barkin [2003](#)).

Critical approaches to the global economy emphasise the nature of oppression and the struggle for justice (O’Brien and Williams [2016](#): 16). While there is no single critical perspective (see Chapters 4–7), it can be argued that critical approaches are united in an attempt to understand the roles that international organisations play in maintaining or challenging the status quo. Critical perspectives thus focus on the dominant interests served by international organisations.

## **Global economic institutions and the management of the global economy**

This section presents a brief sketch of the performance of the three major global economic institutions. As mentioned above, different theorists will arrive at different conclusions about the impact of a specific GEI, since there are no agreed criteria by which to measure the performance of the GEIs. Moreover, different approaches to international relations will emphasise different values. Is the key goal of global economic governance the promotion of security and stability (realism), efficiency (liberalism), equity (radical approaches) or democracy (liberal and radical views)? Analysts who place emphasis on security and stability will differ in their assessments of the performance of GEIs from those who place greater emphasis on efficiency or equity. Of course, these goals need not necessarily be in conflict and a well-functioning governance system is likely to seek to achieve all of these goals. Nevertheless, in practice it often proves difficult to reconcile the demands of stability, efficiency and justice in ways satisfactory to specific constituencies.

### **The International Monetary Fund**

Assessment of the IMF's role in the international monetary governance is the subject of competing interpretations, with critics and supporters unable to agree on the criteria by which to assess the role of the IMF in international monetary governance. The IMF has exhibited a remarkable resilience and adaptability to changed circumstances, and the current role of the IMF is considerably different from that envisaged by its founders. A brief historical overview of the IMF's systemic role demonstrates that its importance to its members and its ability to affect the course of international monetary relations has varied over time.

Consideration of the evolution of the IMF provides an important context for understanding the current operation of the organisation.

Historically, the IMF has attempted to fulfil its central goal of the promotion of international monetary cooperation through the performance of five tasks or functions. It is simultaneously a consultative forum; a lending institution; a surveillance mechanism; a source of policy advice; and a purveyor of technical assistance. Arguably, the most important function performed by the IMF is that of providing financial assistance to its members. The IMF has a number of lending facilities, and its financial instruments have evolved historically partly in response to demand, and partly influenced by prevailing economic orthodoxy.

IMF loans can be classified under two headings: non-concessional and concessional loans. Non-concessional lending covers all loans that must be repaid at market rates. The standard non-concessional lending instrument is the Stand-By Agreement, designed to remedy short-term [balance-of-payments](#) problems. The IMF has also devised a number of non-concessional lending schemes, such as the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), which provides finance for longer-term balance-of-payments problems, and the Supplemental Reserve Facility (SRF), which makes provision for short-term financing on a massive scale. Current concessional lending for low-income countries is undertaken under the auspices of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust Facility (PRGT).

In the context of its lending policies, there has been a long-running debate over the impact of IMF policies regarding recipient countries (Williams [1994](#)). As the IMF became more heavily involved in structural adjustment lending (see [Box 25.2](#)) following the onset of the debt crisis in 1982, the criticisms became more widespread. Essentially, the critics argue that IMF policies have a negative impact on economic growth, result in adverse distributional impacts and lead to political instability (Vreeland [2003](#)). The IMF has argued that the overall record

of its programs is positive, and that the initial conditions in borrower countries have a significant impact on the success of adjustment programs.

**Box 25.2: Terminology**

**Structural adjustment policies**

A typical structural adjustment package contains prescriptions leading to:

- devaluation of the national currency
- cuts in government expenditure
- reduction of the role of the state in production and distribution
- liberalisation of foreign trade
- price liberalisation and deregulation, and
- restructuring government expenditure through privatisation.

Although the IMF has clearly responded to a changing global financial system, many critics question the appropriateness of IMF policies and the continuing relevance of the organisation to a global economy in which global financial integration creates instability, and the diffusion of financial autonomy to banks, transnational corporations and markets significantly weakens national monetary autonomy. The response to the various financial crises (mentioned above) has exposed the failures of governance mechanisms. Surveillance has become increasingly important in the era of financial crises. Recurring financial crises have highlighted the role of lax regulation at national, regional and global levels. The effectiveness of the IMF as an instrument of international monetary governance is linked with its ability to develop a substantial and workable

regulatory role in the international monetary and financial systems. Surveillance can be defined as the monitoring of national, regional and global economies, and the assessment of risk and vulnerabilities. Surveillance is both controversial and difficult to implement because countries and central banks tend to resist the appraisal made by the IMF of their exchange rate policies, and their monetary and fiscal policies. This absence of commitment has resulted in a weakened surveillance mechanism. IMF surveillance activities have received both positive (Broome and Seabrooke [2007](#)) and negative (Claesens and Kodres [2014](#)) assessments.

### **The World Bank**

Like its twinned institution, the World Bank has shown a degree of flexibility and adaptability to a changing international economic order. Established as a single institution in 1944, the World Bank Group now consists of five institutions (see [Box 25.3](#)).

#### **Box 25.3: Discussion points**

##### **The World Bank Group**

The World Bank Group consists of two principal agencies:

- the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)
- the International Development Association (IDA)

and three affiliates:

- the International finance Corporation (IFC)
- the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA)

- the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) was established in 1956 to promote private sector growth in developing countries through investing in private projects, supporting the growth of private capital markets and encouraging flows of domestic and foreign capital. The International Development Association (IDA), created in 1960, is the soft loan affiliate of the IBRD; it provides loans to the poorest developing countries on very favourable terms. The International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) was established as a forum for investor–state dispute-settlement in order to promote international investment. And the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), established in 1988, aims to encourage the flow of direct investment to developing countries through the lessening of non-commercial investment barriers.

The World Bank engages in four key functions in relation to global economic governance. First, it is engaged in financing development and is the largest source of development assistance for poor countries. Second, it provides policy advice to support reform processes in the developing world, and to enhance its technical assistance programs. Third, the Bank plays a central cognitive role in the construction and dissemination of ideas about development. Fourth, the Bank's role is to support the private sector. Each of these roles has given rise to controversies concerning the impact of the World Bank as a mechanism of global economic governance. While for the World Bank and its supporters its lending has been central to promoting development and alleviating poverty, critics contend that its policies are inimical to development. The World

Bank claims that it provides useful supplementary assistance for the governments of developing countries. Moreover, it argues that agreements with the World Bank act as an enabler of international investment. Supporters of World Bank policies think that the conditions it attaches to its loans provide a framework of sound financial management for the governments of its borrower nations (Picciotto [2003](#)). On the other hand, critics accuse the World Bank of putting profits before people, and of distorting development (Caufield [1996](#); Danaher [1994](#)). To the critics, these resources are often insufficient, inadequate and ineffective. They contend that the specific conditionality imposed by the World Bank privileges external interests over those of the recipients and is focused on repayment of the loan rather than improving welfare.

The World Bank's intellectual rationale is based on liberal economic thought, but within this broad paradigm, over time, it has shifted its approach to development. In its early years the World Bank's approach to the financing of economic development focused on industrialisation and large infrastructure projects. A central belief at this time was that economic growth would trickle down from rich to poor, and thus no specific anti-poverty measures were required. From Basic Needs and Redistribution with Growth (1973–80) to Structural Adjustment Lending (1980–95) to Sustainable Development (1995–2007) to the current focus on Crisis and Post-Crisis Lending (2008–15), to Ending Extreme Poverty (2016– ) the World Bank has sought to redefine its priorities in a systematic manner. The World Bank's current focus was established within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (see [Box 25.4](#)).

**Box 25.4:** Discussion points

**The Sustainable Development Goals**

- *Goal 1:* End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- *Goal 2:* End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- *Goal 3:* Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- *Goal 4:* Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- *Goal 5:* Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- *Goal 6:* Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- *Goal 7:* Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- *Goal 8:* Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- *Goal 9:* Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
- *Goal 10:* Reduce inequality within and among countries
- *Goal 11:* Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- *Goal 12:* Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- *Goal 13:* Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

- *Goal 14:* Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- *Goal 15:* Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- *Goal 16:* Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- *Goal 17:* Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

However, while the World Bank is explicitly committed to ending extreme poverty by decreasing the percentage of people living on less than \$1.90 a day to no more than 3 per cent, and promoting shared prosperity by fostering the income growth of the bottom 40 per cent for every country, its normative commitment to market economics and economic growth leads any critics to contend that its fundamental economic approach cannot end poverty or promote environmental sustainability.

### **The World Trade Organization**

Assessment of the WTO's contribution to global governance varies, depending on the view taken of the organisation's ability to affect countries' trade policies and analysis of the beneficial effects of trade liberalisation. The WTO's role in the international trade regime is controversial, and has been so since its

foundation. In assessing the merits of the WTO as an institution of global economic governance, it is important to note the existence of fundamentally competing views of the international trading system, since these influence the assessments made by various analysts of the benefits of the WTO. In other words, attitudes to the WTO arise from contestation over the gains from trade and contrasting attitudes to the regulation of international trade. From the standpoint of liberal trade theory, neoclassical economists and their supporters emphasise the beneficial results of trade liberalisation. Economic nationalist (mercantilist) writers, however, focus on the limitations of the market mechanism to secure the political and economic goals of states. In contrast to economic nationalist thought, which accepts the validity of the law of comparative advantage but contends that market intervention is necessary in certain cases to protect domestic producers, critical theorists tend to argue that international trade is inherently exploitative. Instead of the gains from trade, this perspective emphasises the costs (economic, social, environmental and political) of trade liberalisation. Moreover, the increased regulatory power of the WTO compared with its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), has been a source of contention. While supporters of the WTO praise its sharper enforcement powers (Jackson [2008](#)), critics take a negative view of increasing supranational authority (Wallach and Woodall [2004](#)).

The WTO fulfils three tasks in the quest for global trade governance. First, the WTO agreements (the GATT and the specific agreements made at the conclusion of the Uruguay Round) taken together provide the legal framework for the international trading system (Hoekman and Kostecki [1995](#): 23). This legal framework is the foundation for a non-discriminatory trading system (Qureshi [2009](#): 11), and establishes rules, legal obligations and contractual obligations covering trade in goods, services, and intellectual property. These

agreements are negotiated and signed by governments, thus making them part of international economic law.

Second, the WTO provides a forum for multilateral trade negotiations. A key requirement for the success and legitimacy of the WTO is the extent to which it fulfils its mandate of trade liberalisation through periodic 'rounds' of multilateral trade negotiations. Since its inception, the WTO has presided over piecemeal liberalisation, and has yet to oversee a round of substantial reduction in barriers to trade. The currently stalled Doha Round of trade negotiations provides ammunition for supporters and critics alike. Moreover, the sharp rise of regional trading agreements indicates a preference among member states to seek regional rather than multilateral solutions to trade problems.

Third, the WTO facilitates dispute resolution. An innovative but controversial organisational feature of the WTO is its provisions for the settlement of disputes among its members. During the Uruguay Round negotiations, members were agreed that dispute-settlement procedures were weak and ineffective under the GATT. The WTO thus includes a Dispute Settlement Understanding that provides a mechanism for effective dispute settlement. For some, this function is crucial because it contributes to the stability and further evolution of the world trading system, since liberalisation will not take place in the absence of effective dispute-settlement procedures (Jackson [2008](#): 108–9). For others, the dispute-settlement procedures give authority to unelected judges to make decisions affecting the livelihoods of groups unrepresented in the process (Wallach and Woodall [2004](#): 239–61).

The WTO is committed to the promotion of a liberal trading order. Its policies are predicated on an assumption that trade is better than no trade, and that barriers to trade are harmful to national and international welfare. As a successor to the GATT, the WTO widens and deepens global regulation of international trade and payments. It extends GATT disciplines into areas

previously governed by protectionist devices in the postwar global trade regime, such as agriculture and textiles, and brings ‘new’ issues such as intellectual property rights and investment measures under regulatory control.

## **The global economic institutions and contemporary challenges**

As mentioned earlier, the GEIs are increasingly being called upon to demonstrate that they make effective contributions to global economic governance. We have also argued that there is an absence of consensus concerning the relevant criteria by which to judge the success or failure of the GEIs. One key challenge posed to the GEIs has been to their legitimacy and accountability, and central to this has been the issue of governance reform. This issue has been taken up by governments and civil society activists. From the governmental perspective, the issue has been presented as one of voice and participation.

The quest for governance reform at the IMF and the World Bank has been met with some success. At the IMF, while concern over quota allocation and the weighted voting system were long-standing concerns, the GFC again raised the relevance and legitimacy of the IMF and created the political conditions for greater attention to this issue. In 2010, the Board of Governors approved a reform package that presaged a significant shift of voting power to dynamic emerging markets and developing countries via a doubling of IMF quotas and a 6 per cent quota share increase to the dynamic emerging market and developing countries. In January 2016, the conditions for implementing the reform package were finally satisfied. Under the reforms, the quotas will increase from about SDR 238.5 billion (about US\$329 billion) to SDR 477 billion (about US\$659

billion). Furthermore, more than 6 per cent of quota shares will shift to dynamic emerging market and developing countries, and also from over-represented to under-represented IMF members. The ten largest members of the IMF are now the United States, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Brazil, China, India and the Russian Federation, thus ensuring that emerging market economies will have more adequate representation. The reform package also includes changes to the composition of the Executive Board, which in future will be solely based on elections; two seats currently occupied by European countries will be transferred to the emerging market countries, thus enhancing their representation on the Executive Board.

As with the IMF, criticism has focused on the weighted voting system of the Bank and its marginalisation of developing country members. Moreover, critics argue that the World Bank's policies affect a wide range of stakeholders who are unrepresented in decision-making, and thus the World Bank has limited accountability. A further critique of the World Bank's accountability focuses on the absence of internal accountability – that is, the absence of effective sanctions for failed policies. Third, critics demand greater information about the World Bank's policies in order to improve transparency. Reforms at the World Bank have attempted to address some of these issues. On the issue of representation, the number of executive directors from Africa has been increased from two to three, and the voting power of developing countries and transition economies has been increased in the IBRD by 3.1 percentage points to 47.2 per cent. The World Bank has sought to promote greater transparency and openness through a new disclosure policy, and has opened its storehouse of data to the public. Moreover, it is pioneering a new multilingual, multimedia approach – actively engaging audiences in live events and discussions. While retaining its statist focus, the World Bank has developed enhanced engagement with civil society through

policy dialogue meetings, formal consultations, programmatic collaboration and grant-funding mechanisms.

These reforms have not silenced all critics of the Bretton Woods institutions. The weighted voting system is held by many to be fundamentally undemocratic, and critics contend that the reform process in the two institutions has not adequately addressed the problems linked to a lack of accountability. The fact that the selection of the executive head of these organisations remains wedded to an agreement made in 1945 whereby the IMF is headed by a European national and the World Bank by an American citizen is held to be anachronistic in the modern age.

Unlike the weighted voting system of the IMF and the World Bank, decisions in the WTO are made by consensus. However, one of the major challenges facing the WTO is its ability to make effective decisions. A number of institutional deficiencies that inhibit the search for effective decisions in the WTO have been highlighted in the literature. In legal terms, all members of the WTO are equal and decisions are based on consensus. However, formal equality masks inbuilt asymmetries of power and influence. Three factors account for the asymmetry in bargaining power: share of world trade; the size of the coalition; and the similarity of levels of development. It has been argued that, whereas the developed countries accounting for the largest share of world trade can use market share as a bargaining tool, developing countries lack the economic strength to affect most bargaining outcomes. Moreover, the emergence of rising economic powers, 'especially China, but also India and Brazil have transformed the balance of power in the multilateral trading system' (WTO [2013](#): 268). The rise of new economic powers has transformed decision-making in the WTO through the creation of coalitions. In an attempt to increase their bargaining power, developing countries led by the new economic powers have formed coalitions to influence the negotiating process. Although coalitions function

largely outside the rules-based WTO framework, nevertheless they have immense political importance. Additionally, it has also been argued that the difficulties in arriving at effective decisions arise because there are no adequate consensus-building mechanisms. In the absence of a consensus-building mechanism, trade talks are bound to fail. The difficulties discussed above are further exacerbated by the heterogeneity of WTO membership. Another source of the current challenge facing effective decision-making in the organisation can be viewed from the perspective of the size of the WTO. As the membership of the WTO has increased, it potentially has become more difficult to arrive at decisions.

The global economic crisis highlighted the adequacy of the interventions of the IMF, World Bank and WTO in the global economy. The IMF responded to the GFC in a number of ways, including increasing crisis lending, pursuing governance reform and developing its knowledge base. The IMF increased its lending capacity and restructured its lending programs. This flexibility in lending instruments and increased attention to the needs of the low-income countries, while important, were overshadowed by the fact that the IMF's resources were inadequate to meet the demands of its members for loans. While many countries drew on the IMF, the majority sought funds outside the IMF through central bank swap arrangements. For example, the US Federal Reserve deployed twice the amount of funds made available by the IMF at the height of the crisis. On one hand, assessment of the role of the Bank in response to the GFC and the post-crisis era is positive. It achieved the increased IBRD lending targets, and the Bank's Crisis Response Working Group facilitated synergies by key internal stakeholders. However, the necessity to renew focus on poverty questioned the then prevailing orthodoxy of the World Bank, and demonstrated important gaps in analytical work at the country level. Moreover, concessional

assistance via the IDA was limited as was lending under the auspices of special initiatives.

The balance sheet for the WTO is also mixed. On one hand, the negative impact of the GFC and global recession on world trade was short-lived, with growth levels improving by 2010. The salience of the WTO as an institutional venue supporting trade liberalisation clearly contributed to this result. On the other hand, the WTO has proved powerless to stop the spread of regional trade agreements (RTA), with some 40 per cent of world trade now conducted within the framework of an RTA. This increasing fragmentation of the global economy compounds the problems of global trade governance.

## **Conclusion**

The activities of the IMF, World Bank and WTO have far-reaching consequences for the livelihood of people around the globe. In the post-crisis global economic order, these institutions have proved to be resilient. This is partly because they provide some degree of continuity and certainty in a complex period of economic change. It is also partly because the dominant powers have not devised realistic alternatives and the emerging powers currently lack the ability to do so. But it is also partly because, in an interdependent global economy, some form of policy coordination is required and, in the absence of viable alternatives, the existing institutions will be utilised.

Nevertheless, persistent criticisms remain of the ability of the three institutions to contribute to stability, efficiency and justice in the global economy. The unevenness of the globalisation process, rising inequality (domestically and internationally) and competing visions of approaches to economic management and the goals of economic activity suggest that continued

debate over their relevance and usefulness will remain active for the foreseeable future.

## Discussion questions

**25.1** In an era of globalisation, are global economic institutions indispensable instruments of global governance?

**25.2** Does global financial integration render the IMF's role redundant?

**25.3** The World Bank may take an interest in development, but can it ever be a development agency?

**25.4** Are regional trade agreements (and not the WTO) the future of global trade governance?

## *Further reading*

Helleiner, Eric 2014, *Forgotten foundations of Bretton Woods: International development and the making of the postwar order*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. *An important corrective to the orthodox narrative about the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions.*

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Moschella, Manuella and Weaver, Catherine (eds) 2014, *Handbook of global economic governance*, Abingdon: Routledge. *A useful compendium of articles written by leading specialists.*

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Narlikar, Amrita, Daunton, Martin and Stern, Robert M. (eds) 2014, *The Oxford handbook on the World Trade Organization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A collection of chapters with a focus on the political economy of the WTO.*

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Woods, Ngaire 2006, *The globalizers: The IMF, the World Bank and their borrowers*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. *Examines the effects of IMF and World Bank lending in Africa, Mexico and Russia.*

# Global trade and finance



**Leonard Seabrooke and Maryanne Kelton**

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## Introduction

This chapter presents a fleeting history of key changes in global trade and finance in the post-war period, organised around the themes of *crisis* and

*cooperation*. The first section of the chapter discusses the key themes; the second section considers the emergence of the post-World War II Bretton Woods regime; the third section outlines the rise of private capital in the 1970s; the fourth section traces the impact of the Debt Crisis of the 1980s; the fifth section considers discussions of global financial architecture in the 1990s and the early 2000s; and the sixth section discusses changes from 2004 to 2016, focusing on how the trade regime has stalled and the financial regime has partly been rolled back. Finally, the concluding section reflects on what changes in the US administration and the reassertion of economic nationalism might mean for global trade and finance. Key terms relating to global trade and finance are explained in [Box 26.1](#).

#### **Box 26.1:** Terminology

##### **Key global trade and finance terms**

***Compromise of embedded liberalism:*** Compromise struck between the free market and government control in managing the international economy.

***Economic liberalism:*** Perspective that favours free and open trade and finance, separate from politics, believing that this approach maximises economic efficiency and thereby prosperity.

***Economic nationalism:*** Government policies designed to protect local industries from foreign competition.

***Mercantilism:*** Trade policies designed to maximise state power/wealth, often at the expense of others.

***Most favoured nation:*** GATT Article I principle of non-discrimination between trading partners.

***National treatment:*** The principle, enshrined in GATT Article III, that requires imports receive the same treatment as domestically produced goods.

***Non-tariff barriers:*** Protection measures other than direct taxes designed to limit foreign competition. These may include quotas (or limits), sanitary regulation or import licensing.

***Orderly market arrangements:*** Bilateral arrangements where the exporting country cooperates to limit exports. Voluntary Export Restraints (VER) and Voluntary Restraint Arrangements (VRA) are similar mechanisms.

***Protection:*** Barriers designed to defend local producers from foreign competition.

***Public goods:*** Goods that can continue to be enjoyed despite others' use. Benefits can extend across borders and generations – for example, a lighthouse.

***Radicalism:*** Perspective that critiques a competitive and conflictual capitalist trading regime and argues for system change.

***Rules of origin:*** These rules set the criteria for the assessment of the country of origin of a product.

***Tariff:*** Customs duty on imported merchandise. Protects local goods from competition. Revenue-raising measure for governments.

***Terms of trade:*** Ratio of the price of export commodities against import commodities.

## Who is afraid of the global economic system?

Calls for the study of global trade and finance were initially based on fears that the collapse of the [Bretton Woods](#) system (discussed below) gave market actors the upper hand over states, and that the states needed to cooperate to avoid tariffs and encourage economic growth. Without cooperation on trade and finance, the world economy would be prone to frequent and severe economic crises, reinforcing trade wars, agitating actual military conflicts and creating a drain on the established welfare systems in advanced industrial economies. Such a failure would also hinder economic growth and state-building in developing economies, deepening their structural economic dependence on the West.

Within International Relations (IR), the study of global trade and finance in international relations has developed a broad range of research questions and analytical perspectives. The sub-field of International Political Economy typically considers two key themes: (1) *crisis* – why the contemporary world economy is prone to international economic crises; and (2) *cooperation* – how to combat crises and enhance cooperation through the creation of a better designed regimes, especially through international organisations. The most common aspect of both themes is the role of the United States as the ‘hegemon’ within global trade and financial regimes, as it respectively propagates crises in trade and finance in reaction to domestic pressures, and seeks to dominate formal decision-making in trade and finance regimes.

## The rise and fall of the Bretton Woods system, 1946–71

Born after a period of devastation wrought by two World Wars and the Great Depression, a new economic order attempted to remove barriers to trade, promote prosperity and thereby prevent a repeat of past tragedies. In the inter-war period of the 1920s, the major international economies had increasingly employed *protection* to shield their domestic industries from imports from their international competitors. As a consequence, world trade declined dramatically and, together with speculative behaviour and shallow regulation, the Great Depression ensued in 1929. With the Depression came the rise of militarism and fascism, culminating in World War II. The emergent post-war system sponsored by the United States aimed at implementing a liberal trading regime that both espoused and practised free and open trade, coupled with national control over finances. Part of the post-war reconstruction process involved countries profiting from access to markets and the gradual removal of barriers to capital movement. Trade was perceived to be inextricably connected not only to prosperity, but also to [peace](#). As the United States emerged from the war in a position to oversee any new international economic order, and had drawn a line from *economic nationalism* to the devastation of [war](#), it was intent on overseeing a post-war economic order based on principles of *economic liberalism*. Undoubtedly it was in the interests of the United States to establish a system of free trade and support financial policies, giving greater autonomy to its banks and industries. The argument that was crafted affirmed the benefits that would be distributed to all economies in the international system. It was intended as a positive-sum game.

These free-trade arguments were derived from the work of both Adam Smith (1723–90) and David Ricardo (1772–1823), who argued that free trade,

through the encouragement of competition, advanced economic efficiency and created better products and cheaper prices of goods for consumers. Smith ([1998 \[1776\]](#)) attempted to demonstrate that ‘the invisible hand of the market’, in allowing individuals to pursue private gains, would ultimately benefit the collective public interest. Ricardo ([1973](#)) built upon this advocacy of free trade by developing the [theory](#) of comparative advantage. In the international economy, states received a net gain in welfare where they specialised in what they produced. This specialisation could result from their natural endowments or policy prescriptions, and involved those items they could produce more efficiently, relative to other countries. These products could then be traded for items produced by other states as a consequence of their comparative advantage. For example, when we compare Australia’s climate, space and topography with that of China, we find that Australia had a comparative advantage *vis-à-vis* China in the production of wool versus clothing (that is, Australia had a comparative advantage in the production of wool, whereas through the abundance of cheap labour, one of China’s comparative advantages was the mass production of apparel). Liberal economists argue that through this division of labour, efficiencies are maximised and the international trading system can deliver benefits to all. In the realm of finance, the argument was that free movement of capital was a source of economic growth, with states placing control on capital where necessary to guard against external shocks to their national welfare regimes.

This theory of liberal economics was given material form through the meeting of forty-four states at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in 1944, where the new liberal economic order was constructed and the multilateral institutions of the [World Bank](#), [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) and the [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade \(GATT\)](#) were established (see [Chapter 25](#)). Originally the Bretton Woods states had envisioned an International Trade

Organization to establish and implement the new trading regime. However, the US Senate, fearing a diminution of US power, opposed its formation. Although at its formal instigation in 1947 the GATT was intended as a temporary institution, it oversaw the reduction of tariffs, particularly on manufactured goods, through multilateral trade negotiations rounds or talks until its transformation into the WTO in 1995. The driving tenet of the GATT was its category of *most favoured nation* (also now normal trading relations) status and *national treatment* rules based on principles of non-discrimination. These principles aimed to encourage trade on an open multilateral basis.

**Box 26.2: Key organisations**

**Key international regimes for the global economic system**

- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank ([www.aiib.org](http://www.aiib.org))
- Bank of International Settlements ([www.bis.org](http://www.bis.org))
- International Monetary Fund ([www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org))
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org))
- World Bank Group ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org))
- World Trade Organization ([www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)).

Yet, despite the intention that the GATT should be a vehicle for comprehensive trade liberalisation, there were some notable exceptions. Exemptions were granted as a consequence of the political nature of its inception and testimony to the compromise wrought between *laissez-faire* economists and

domestic interventionists. Keen to protect their farmers, the United States and Western European countries exempted agricultural barriers from discussion. Discriminatory trading blocs such as the European Economic Community (EEC) and the British Commonwealth, which conducted preferential trading within their membership group, were granted exemptions. Services trade too was initially outside the boundaries of the negotiations, principally because of its lesser import in the 1940s. Nevertheless, while the post-war liberal economic system was designed to remove obstacles to free trade, many still exist, for an array of reasons. As tariffs were gradually reduced or removed, an assortment of *non-tariff barriers* were deployed to serve the same function. In addition to both import and export quotas, financial subsidies exist to assist specific industries and producers. For example, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidies were estimated to be worth €42 billion in 2015 (although as a proportion of the EU budget this figure has been slowly declining), while in 2014 the US Farm Bill provided approximately US\$956 billion over ten years in total, with US\$44 billion in commodity assistance for its farmers. Some countries' stringent quarantine regulations have been perceived as a vehicle for [protectionism](#) by stealth, by preventing the import of a range of foreign agricultural products. Furthermore, both countervailing duties (taxes on imported goods that are believed to have benefited from government subsidies) and anti-dumping duties (taxes designed to counteract markets being swamped by the sale of goods at below-cost prices) have been utilised to counter foreign governments' suspected use of subsidies.

In the global finance regime the IMF's Articles of Agreement set out that all of its member states should cooperate to maintain high levels of growth and employment, and that they should avoid the types of predatory currency practices seen during the Great Depression. This system ideally provided the 'embedded liberalism compromise' (Ruggie [1982](#)), where states engaged in pro-

growth international finance and trade while also retaining the right to steer their domestic welfare regimes in whatever way they saw fit. It also followed the notion that there were ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ types of investment in global finance, and that controls on capital flows – especially short-term speculative investment – could greatly reduce financial risks through new internationally agreed rules. The key to the new system was the rule that states would keep their domestic currencies in check in relation to a fixed exchange rate of US\$35 per ounce of gold. This ‘gold-dollar’ standard would ideally ensure that all states in the global system would not fall into ‘fundamental disequilibrium’ with global standards. The ambiguity of how ‘fundamental disequilibrium’ was understood by different states as crucial to maintaining a consensus on the need for international cooperation (Best [2005](#)).

From the mid-1950s, the development of ‘Euromarkets’ allowed financial actors to wrestle autonomy away from the state – an autonomy it had maintained since the Great Depression. The Euromarkets are a bit of a mind-bender. The markets were named ‘Euro’ because they were located primarily in London and Paris, although legally they operated in limbo. The markets were anonymous, untaxed and highly liquid secondary markets for securities and currency trading. Between 1960 and 1970, the size of the ‘Eurocurrency’ market expanded from US\$2 billion to US\$57 billion, while ‘Eurobond’ and foreign bond markets grew from US\$0.8 billion to US\$5.3 billion (Webb [1995](#): 98). In short, in parallel to the international public system, an international private system for global finance was quickly gaining power. This system was also implicitly supported by the US government, since it favoured the expansion of US banks overseas during a period in which they were trying to maintain high growth with little inflation inside the United States. This ‘exported’ a potential domestic financial crisis. Given the growth of Euromarkets, there was a great degree of uncertainty and speculation about the real value of the US dollar in relation to an ounce of gold.

The architecture for global finance groaned under the weight of such speculation, especially as prominent figures, such as French President Charles de Gaulle, referred to the United States' 'exorbitant privilege' in being able to print dollars with no proof that it had the gold to support it. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many central banks called the United States' bluff by exchanging their US dollars for gold at \$35 per ounce when in private markets the rate was thought to be US\$41 dollars per ounce. Eventually, under such pressure, President Richard Nixon closed the 'gold window' in 1971, claiming that the United States had been subsidising the world economy for too long. The world economy could no longer bear the weight of its own contradictions and fell into crisis.

## **Domestic stagflation, international over-lending and international competitiveness, 1972–81**

Nixon's closing of the 'gold window' and the sheer weight of private capital now in the world economy signalled a change in global finance away from state-led forms of governance to market-led forms of governance (Helleiner [1994](#)). A new floating and flexible monetary system was fuelled also by the massive amount of private capital generated by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) oil crisis of 1973–74, which became recycled 'petrodollars' through the Euromarkets, and guaranteed the further ascension of international banks in global finance. In general, the amount of private capital in the global system quickly reached an amount that was double that of public capital (Germain [1997](#)). Many international banks lent huge sums of money to developing country governments in lending syndicates, while in developed countries economic growth stagnated, with high inflation and high

unemployment ('stagflation') prompting policy-makers to revise the [Keynesian](#) economic theories that underpinned the Bretton Woods period.

The international trading system also lurched towards crisis, as it was increasingly seen in zero-sum terms, with the effects of foreign state use of mercantilist policies perceived acutely in the United States. The United States implemented a plethora of *orderly market arrangements*, including *voluntary export restraints* agreed to by other countries in order to preserve US domestic industries. Where possible, the costs of structural adjustment were intended to be transferred offshore through a trade policy of aggressive [unilateralism](#), comprising market opening and increased domestic support. In theoretical terms, this period was characterised by realist politics, while IR scholars wrote about the importance of building an architecture for cooperation (Keohane and Nye [1989 \[1977\]](#)). During this time, many of the Asian states pursued a state-managed model of economic development while the Europeans consistently managed a system of preferential trading. As the Japanese economy surged, the newly industrialising economies of Asia grew strong and the European economies were reconstructed successfully, the United States felt the threat to its hegemonic position, already exposed strategically as a consequence of its failing Vietnam War strategy. Countries hitherto given concessions as part of the US [Cold War](#) strategy were increasingly thought to be free riders on the US economy.

## **Debt crises at home and abroad, 1982–92**

In the early 1980s, it was obvious that the problems with the system were more widespread than those of competition between developed countries. The European Union and Japan had argued that in certain circumstances the state had

a legitimate role in preserving food security in addition to sponsoring local and community interests. Yet these multifunctionality arguments exacerbated the trading and financial difficulties experienced by developing and least developed countries within the system.

Trade tensions led to crises on the current account, the trading element of the [balance of payments](#), leading a series of developing country governments to default on their international syndicated loans – most prominently Mexico in 1982. This ‘Debt Crisis’ shook the US financial system to its core, since the top US banks had grossly over-committed capital within syndicated bank loans. The consequence was that the big international banks went to the ‘London Club’, where borrower repayment negotiations for private interests were coordinated, while the ‘G5’ states (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Japan and Germany) discussed coordinating debt repayments at the ‘Paris Club’. International organisations – the IMF and the World Bank – were also brought in to reform the affected borrower states. Indeed, the use of Structural Adjustment Programs in Latin America gave both international organisations, but especially the IMF, bad reputations for decades to follow. Common reform measures included trade liberalisation and export orientation, coupled with tax reform, deregulation and financial reform.

The key changes to the global financial regime were new requirements on how much capital banks had to store away to buffer against crises, primarily coordinated through the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (BCBS), which is affiliated with the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), that originally dealt with inter-war reparations issues. The new international banking regime gave a clear advantage to US banks, and clearly disadvantaged the Japanese banks, which had to buy enormous amounts of safe assets, in the form of US Treasury bonds. Again, the United States was able to exercise its

‘structural power’ in the global financial system by changing the rules of the game in its favour (Strange [1988](#)).

The term ‘Washington Consensus’ was loosely (and often pejoratively) applied to denote the commonality of policy advice originating in the Western-led organisations and US Treasury. As Dani Rodrik ([1999](#): 1) later claimed, ‘in many “emerging” economies traditional developmental concerns relating to industrialisation and poverty have been crowded out by the pursuit of “international competitiveness”’. Moreover, it was argued that free trade of itself was not responsible for growth; instead, macroeconomic stability and investment were more significant determinants (Rodrik [1999](#)). The IMF, in particular, advocated capital account liberalisation as a common solution, to permit capital to flow where it could be most productive. The notion of ‘unproductive’ capital fell out of use.

Outside the mainstream economic discourses, *radicalism* developed in response to the dominance of the liberal economists. While [Marxism](#) informed the structure of the communist economies and trade between the central and Eastern European [Warsaw Pact](#) countries, through the 1960s and 1970s radical theorists posited that liberal economic policies and the international trading regime only exacerbated the problems of inequality. Dependency theorists argued that [capitalism](#) entrenched the wealth of the powerful states and left the developing countries in a fixed state of exploitation. Feminists also critiqued the trading regime as it neglected to address the effect of the system on women. The discourse of fair trade in this respect contested the ability of the existing system to provide for all in a just manner. Moreover, critics argued that instead of everyone benefiting from the rising tide of free trade, frequent storms often swamped the opportunities of the least developed.

## Talking about architecture, 1993–2004

During this period, the global trade architecture shifted through the evolution of the GATT to its reincarnation as the WTO, to the rise of preferential trade agreements (PTA). In an effort to develop the breadth and depth of the trading system, the WTO was established to include further cooperation via negotiations on agriculture, textiles, services, intellectual property rights and the movement of capital, in addition to a mechanism by which disputes could be resolved. Meanwhile, trade growth escalated as a consequence of the switch in emphasis by the large players to global production systems and geopolitical developments that fostered more integrated trading relations.

The global trade regime has variously been praised as providing the engine for global growth and critiqued for exploiting weaker players in the international system. The intense protests at the WTO Millennium Round's Third Ministerial Meeting in Seattle in November and December 1999 witnessed a dramatic illustration of the disputes being fought over the operation of the trading regime. Intellectual criticisms were directed at the theoretical limitations of the free trade paradigm, and concerns were expressed over the practical injustices of the trading regime. Criticisms mostly coalesced around the inability of the current arrangements to redress global inequities. Critics pointed to the inherent lack of distributive justice in the system. Some remonstrated that the trading regime was manipulated to advantage by a few industrialised, powerful [states](#) – and indeed the establishment of the WTO represented the vehicle by which the rich Western economies would expand into new markets. Others protested the size of the profits taken from the system by [multinational corporations](#). Labour groups in some industrialised countries objected to the erosion of their wages as they competed with cheaper wage arrangements in developing countries, while

environmentalists railed against the ever-increasing capitalist demands on resources.

This inability of the current system to maintain the pace of multilateral liberalisation provided some of the impetus for the spate of PTAs. Problematic in the spate of overlapping PTAs is the ‘noodle bowl effect’, where rules-of-origin measures are difficult to disentangle because of the large numbers of parties and cross-cutting regimes comprising the discussions (Bhagwati [1995](#)). Some of the negotiations to which wealthy states are parties attempt to implement ‘WTO plus’ or ‘third-wave’ considerations that reach beyond border constraints into areas traditionally regarded as domestic public policy concerns. Related to these developments was the demonstration effect for other countries’ consultations as agreements incorporated attempts to write rules for new sectors such as labour, the environment and intellectual property rights, including those relevant to the media and medicines, to be integrated into trade agreements. The Obama administration’s interest in the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP) was illustrative of each of these motivations.

That said, the corporate and commercial story of this period – the dramatic increase in global trade – lay in the processes of structural adjustment spurring the dramatic growth of global value chains. Large manufacturing and retail groups outsourced segments of the production chain across the globe in a hunt for maximum efficiencies and lower costs. But the striking growth in global trade *vis-à-vis* global income in this period also testifies to the contextual importance of the geopolitical environment. In Europe, the demise of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany and created conditions for enhanced trading relations. Globally, the internationalisation of the Chinese economy and its accession to the WTO were to boost trade growth dramatically (Hoekman [2015](#)).

In the global finance regime, change was also rapid, with further cooperative efforts between states largely ignoring financial innovations that fuelled the next set of crises. As international banks faced stronger constraints on formal lending, they moved increasingly into securities markets. Innovations from disintermediation and securitisation led banks to further their interest in turning assets such as home loans into financial products. Both processes, originated in the United States, have revolutionised global finance since the 1980s and led to a much stronger emphasis on creditworthiness and surveillance. These processes have been supported by international financial institutions such as the IMF, as well as giving more power to quasi-regulators, such as bond rating agencies like Moody's and Standard and Poor's. Many emerging market economies embraced this new way of financing, with their issuance of bonds for government debt increasing from US\$13.9 billion in total in 1991 to US\$127.9 billion in 1997 (Mosley [2003](#): 108).

With these changes, the number of financial crises reflected the increased intensity of capital mobility in the system. These financial crises, like those in earlier decades, were concerned primarily with the repayment of debts. However, unlike in the 1980s Debt Crisis, in the 1990s the problem was not typically a lack of export earnings, but rather a liquidity problem (having the ready cash) at moments when investors chose to withdraw their capital. It was a crisis on the capital account, the financial element of the balance of payments. This was the case most prominently in Mexico in 1993–94, Thailand and South Korea in 1997–98 and Russia in 1998. In all of these crises, changes in the value of the US dollar, altered through US interest rates, played a crucial role – especially as many states had adopted currency pegs, by which they moved the value of their own currency in accordance with the dollar. In short, an interest rate spike in the United States sent quick shockwaves to emerging market economies, which had to push up their own currencies, in turn feeding

speculation over their capacity to do so. In all of these crises the role of the United States in international organisations was questioned during a period in which the changing shape of global finance gave it more power over decision-making. For example, within the IMF the approval of a ‘special decision’ for an extraordinarily big loan requires 85 per cent of members’ votes. Votes within the IMF are allocated according to subscriptions and the United States held between 17 and 18 per cent of the vote throughout the 1990s. Loans from the IMF thus came under the scrutiny of the US Congress, which did exercise its right to veto loans – most notably in the Mexican case. The consequence was that large international loans for crisis financing were increasingly cobbled together by the IMF in association with the Bank for International Settlements and wealthy member states (Seabrooke [2006](#): 187–8). Following these crises, there was an efflorescence of forums to increase cooperation among international organisations, including agreements between the IMF, BIS, World Bank and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on sharing data about their member states. Finance ministers within the most powerful states held numerous meetings on the ‘global financial architecture’ with the aim of fostering greater regulatory harmonisation, most notably through the establishment of the Financial Stability Forum in 1999.

## **Promises, promises: Credit booms and liquidity busts, 2004–16**

The themes of crisis and cooperation have continued during the most recent period in the global trade and finance regimes, but the character of both has changed. Crises have become more prolonged than the seemingly short bursts of the 1990s, have affected many countries within the OECD, and are much more

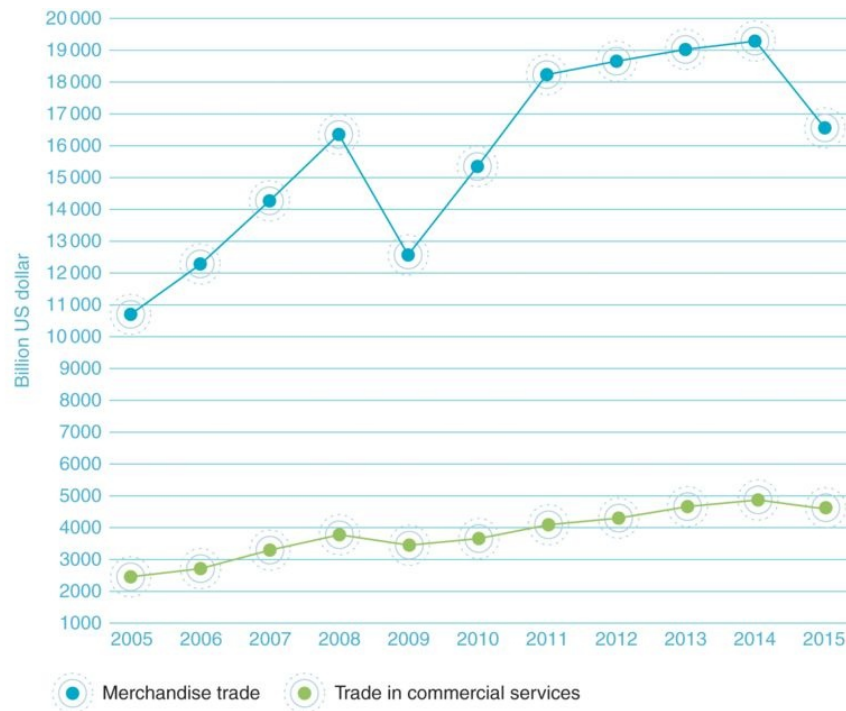
embedded in the everyday life of citizens in both the OECD and developing economies. Cooperation now involves more actors than in the past, with multinational corporations and [non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#) also involved in multi-stakeholder deliberations.

In the global finance regime, the rise of what we can call quasi-regulators with ‘private authority’ was important for the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) that erupted in 2007–08. As the international banking regime gave greater power and authority to credit rating agencies such as Standard and Poor’s and Moody’s, financial institutions relied more heavily on their internal risk modelling, which was supported by international organisations, especially the BCBS. This led to massive issuance of securities of dubious value, which were underpinned by assets such as home mortgages (Schwartz [2009](#)). As financial institutions tied their profitability to issuing securities supported by housing, they had an interest in extending credit to would-be homeowners, as well as inflating housing prices. This occurred in most Anglophone economies, especially in Ireland and the United States. The ‘sub-prime’ crisis of 2007–08 was the consequence. The response to the crisis was to cooperate by emboldening the Financial Stability Forum into the Financial Stability Board in 2009, which now coordinates on regulatory and prudential oversight with international organisations and the leading advanced economies. During this period, there was much talk about policy-makers and central bankers, and about the need to introduce ‘macroprudential’ regulations that would dampen banks’ boom and bust cycles, but no particular international organisation or Great Power led the way in implementing these policies.

Following the GFC, a crisis of public expenditure erupted in Europe, with Southern European states, Ireland and Hungary in dire straits. Their troubles came from property bubbles – particularly in Spain – as well as from international over-lending (which is both the lender’s and borrower’s

responsibility), and from excessive government expenditure without matched revenues – especially in the Greek case. The structure of the European Union, which provides a currency union without a fiscal union, led to many complications in dealing with the crisis. While capital circulated freely between banks and governments within Europe, there was no common consolidated way of using European taxpayers' money to assist governments that were in trouble. The IMF was therefore brought in to assist with economic restructuring, which was very unpopular, while the European Union pushed for 'austerity' measures that further deepened economic woes. The European Union also responded by creating its own institutions, such as the European Stability Mechanism, to assist with crisis countries, while – just like the United States – not dealing with the reform of large banks responsible for over-lending.

In trade, there has been the further splintering of the regime through FTAs and PTAs, which have become the norm. Bilateral arrangements on trade and investment have become usual, even if they clearly lead to worse deals than multilateral cooperation – partly because weaker states signing trade and investment treaties have a poorer understanding of the exact terms and implications of the agreements (Poulsen [2015](#)). The GFC also had a significant impact on trade. World trade has experienced long periods of extended expansion and delivered some spectacular profits, but it has also suffered some severe recessionary setbacks. These were induced in 1974–75 by the oil price rise shocks, in 1982–83 by the combination of inflation and unemployment (stagflation), and in 2001–02 by the techwreck (Baldwin [2009](#)). Trade volume contractions over these periods were 0.2 per cent, 2 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. [Figure 26.1](#) reveals the extent to which world merchandise trade and trade in commercial services have been affected by the GFC and the more recent slowdown in the Chinese economy.



**Figure 26.1** World merchandise trade and trade in commercial services, 2005–15

Source: WTO, ‘Trends in World Trade: Looking Back over the Past Ten Years’, *World Trade Statistical Review* 2016, Chapter 2, p. 10

So why the fall in trade of such magnitude and also immediacy – indeed, the most significant since the Great Depression? Principally, the ‘sub-prime’ crisis precipitated a collapse in demand, initially in the United States and then elsewhere across the globe. It also limited the availability of credit in the international system. The extent to which the banking sector and also global supply chains are interconnected helps to explain the synchronised effects of the crisis. In short, people delayed purchases of consumer goods, such as cars, as they carefully weighed up their financial future. For businesses, the lack of credit in some cases delayed investment decisions, and in others foreclosed factories. The flow-on effect of an employment crisis further reduced demand. In industry, too, the iron and steel producers were intimately affected by factory shutdowns

and the shrinking purchase of machinery, together with the collapse of construction in the real estate sector. Moreover, both the global and 'just-in-time' production features of the supply chain not only sensitised the system to downturns in other geographic regions but ensured that it was immediately responsive (Baldwin [2009](#)).

Initially, the drive to recovery from the GFC included the restoration of global trade, in part fuelled by government stimulus packages. As a result, employment opportunities underwent a revival in most countries. In the first half of 2010, world trade expanded almost as dramatically as it had contracted in the previous year. So quick was this year-on-year expansion that it was the fastest recorded since 1950. However, as the government assistance measures concluded, the pace of growth could not be maintained.

To date, the recovery remains muted. Government assistance has dissipated and, although trade is less sensitive to GDP growth, growth remains sluggish. Given the structural adjustment that has occurred as a consequence of the recession, there appear to be enduring effects in political pressures to pursue increasingly protectionist trade policies. In 2016, the WTO recorded its concerns regarding the growing trend of post-GFC trade-restrictive measures (Azevêdo [2016](#)), with the reinstigation of subsidies led by the Russian Federation, India and the United States (Evenett and Fritz [2015](#)). Furthermore, prospects for reform of the trading system, which may require wealthy states to offer concessions to the least developed countries, will be less likely. Given the unmet expectations that the GFC has wrought in the mature economies, the polity may be less able, but also less inclined, to assist those outside their immediate national sphere of concern. Moreover, the political fallout from the GFC and the inability of the international economic system to continue to meet expectations for an industrial middle class appears in part to have manifested in both the British Brexit decision and the election of President Donald Trump in the United

States, and consequently the now moribund TPP. These considerations further indicate the difficulties of a 'WTO plus' agenda, where questions regarding the preferencing of corporatised interests and the diminution of sovereign control are readily raised.

## **Conclusion: Crisis, cooperation and the reemergence of economic nationalism**

During the post-war period, change in the global trade and finance regimes can be seen through the treatment of crisis and the character of cooperation. In the current period, crises are here for the long haul, with governments using their fiscal revenues to ensure that important financial institutions do not fail. At the same time, there is no political will within the OECD to raise income and corporate taxes to maintain national welfare regimes. Instead, an important current change in the global financial regime is the hunt for 'fiscal leaks'. This is essentially a consensus among Great Powers to try to break long-established tax-avoidance and evasion schemes used by multinational corporations and elites. Cooperation on finding 'tax cheats' is being led by the OECD and is supported by the IMF, which recognises the need for governments to ease austerity policies and increase both revenue and expenditure to boost economic growth. In the trade regime, continued malaise in the WTO and the ongoing proliferation of PTAs signals that increased cooperation is unlikely. For both trade and finance, the rise of economic nationalism in OECD economies – notably the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany – is a source of serious concern. President Trump's raising of tariffs early in his presidency is alarming. Advocates of free trade and finance foresee a double challenge. First, they must demonstrate how the capital and trade openness of economic globalisation has

been of benefit to the majority of populations when there are obvious signs of wage stagnation for the middle and working classes, and heightened inequality for all. Second, the architecture of cooperation has become more complex, with many actors involved, and convincing politicians of the benefits of cooperation during a period of resurgent economic nationalism may be difficult – at least until the next global crisis.

## **Discussion questions**

**26.1** Explain the international and domestic determinants of the global trade and finance regimes.

**26.2** What were the key features of the Bretton Woods system?

**26.3** Is trade fair? If not, how can this inequity be resolved?

**26.4** What are the main features of the contemporary global financial regulation?

**26.5** To what degree are global financial markets shaped by private authorities?

**26.6** How have developments in global trade and finance changed, and how are they changing, the character of states?

**26.7** To what extent should domestic policy be influenced by trade policy and ‘third-wave’ trade agreements?

**26.8** Does trade reduce poverty?

**26.9** What was the cause of the Asian financial crisis? What caused the sub-prime crisis? How are the causes different?

**26.10** Can you envisage a looming trade war between the great powers?

*Further reading*

## Further Reading

Capling, Ann 2001, *Australia and the global trade system: From Havana to Seattle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An excellent account of Australia's place in the global trading system.*

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Germain, Randall 2010, *Global politics and financial governance*, New York: Palgrave. *A fine book suggesting that long-term trends in international financial governance are likely to lead to a system based on global governance and national responsibility as national interest is reasserted.*

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Gilpin, Robert 2001, *Global political economy: Understanding the international economic order*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *A comprehensive account of the history and competing ideologies of the international political economy.*

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Helleiner, Eric 1994, *States and the reemergence of global finance*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. *A classic text tracing the evolution of the politics of the post-war global financial system, clashes between key states and the transition to more market-driven forms of power.*

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Schwartz, Herman M. 2009, *Subprime nation*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. *Investigates the foundations of the 2007–09 international financial crisis, especially the international links to American housing and financial markets.*

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Seabrooke, Leonard 2006, *The social sources of financial power*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. *Discusses how state intervention in everyday finance contributes to the state's international financial capacity when the majority of the population views the normative (not material) structures underpinning taxation, credit and housing to be legitimate. It explores two historical periods and four cases (the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan).*

## **Journals**

Key international relations journals that commonly discuss global finance include: *International Organisation*; *International Politics*; *International Studies Quarterly*; *New Political Economy*; *Review of International Political Economy*; and *World Politics*.

# Global poverty, inequality and development



**Heloise Weber and Mark T. Berger**

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## Introduction

This chapter examines the politics of global poverty, inequality and development. The first section provides the background for our analysis of global poverty and inequality. Any meaningful discussion of poverty and inequality necessarily has to be in relation to development – which, as we show,

is itself contested in theory and practice (McMichael [2010](#)). The second section provides a basic outline of a relational perspective of global development. The final section focuses on the [UN](#) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We conclude with some critical observations about the relationship between development, poverty and inequality.

## **Global poverty and inequality in development**

Concerns about global poverty have been high on the agenda in world politics at least since the start of the new millennium. For example, the MDG initiative was conceived as part of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000), and followed by the declaration on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (2015). This high-level focus on development and poverty is not surprising, as not only is the worldwide gap between the rich and the poor growing, but there has also been an unprecedented rise in insecurities and vulnerability in the everyday lived experiences of many people, particularly those experiencing poverty. Two highly visible issues can be drawn upon to illustrate the growth of inequality and poverty in global development. These are the growth of slum-dweller and/or squatter communities (see Cattaneo and Martinez [2014](#)), and the rise of food insecurities for many across the globe. For example, in *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis ([2006](#)) documents the rise and expansion of slum dwellings globally, and draws attention to the rapid increases in precarious living conditions in urban and peri-urban areas. The expansion of slum dwellings occurs in direct relation to development processes, including industrialisation and urbanisation. In the case of food insecurities, the rise in the incidence of food riots globally since the 1980s has also been taking place in the midst of high technology-oriented, high

mass-scale production of food for the global market (Patel [2008](#); Walton and Seddon [1994](#)). Activists, [non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#), policy-makers, politicians and scholars are all engaged in rigorous debates about the scale and character of global poverty and inequality, and have embarked on various campaigns to ‘make poverty history’. However, first and foremost, it is important to carefully reflect on the history of poverty and inequality; any meaningful discussion of these two issues is incomplete without addressing their corollary: development (see [Box 27.1](#)).

### **Box 27.1: Terminology**

#### **Poverty**

When people (or, as often happens, *a community or group of people*) are described as experiencing ‘poverty’, this is often associated with material lack, vulnerabilities and visions of precarious existences more generally. However, as Ashis Nandy ([1987](#), [2002](#)) has shown, there are very good reasons to be mindful of the implications of this framing of poverty.

Consider the following two scenarios:

**1** A group of people sets out on a food-gathering trip, which takes the participants a long way from their homestead. On the way, they tell each other stories in light, makeshift camps, and subsist on a rich diet of foodstuffs gathered along the way (the Australian film *Ten Canoes*, for instance, tells such a story). They get to their destination, where they go hunting for a migratory species that comes through seasonally, and they eventually return to their homestead. Some who may have taken part in this activity would have gathered new knowledge and skills from their more experienced community members in the process.

**2** A young mother of three children aged between three and nine years

leaves the two younger ones in the care of the nine-year-old to trek 5 kilometres from her makeshift shack in a slum dwelling on the outskirts of Kampala to a suburb where she occasionally has been able to earn small sums by working for wealthier locals, helping out with the laundry. For the fourth day in a row, she is unsuccessful, despite going from door to door, and returns home having purchased some cassava flour with some of the little money she has left from a micro-loan she took for her 'laundry business'. Her partner has spent the whole day moving from building site to building site looking for casual employment as a day-labourer, and has been unsuccessful too. The loan repayments are due every fortnight, and there are only three days left.

Nandy's point is that both these scenarios, as different as they are, tend to fall under the description of poverty. This is problematic for the following reasons:

**1** In the first case, those identified as 'poor' may themselves not conceive of themselves as such, but actually experience themselves as living not in 'destitution', but rather in conditions of abundance of sorts, and within rich relationships that they value.

**2** The family in the second case experiences hardship, but their hardship is not an original condition, even if it is represented as such. Rather, their 'hardship' is itself an *outcome* of processes of development.

By representing the vulnerable or destitute as living in an original condition of poverty, the processes by which they have ended up in this condition are

obliterated. For instance, the family may have been forced off their subsistence farm in the countryside by developers (see McMichael [2006](#); Nandy [2002](#)).

We need to keep two more points in perspective for our analysis. First, debates about global poverty and inequality have not always been situated within, or in relation to, the wider debate about development; instead, these debates have often been conducted from *within* a particular modernisation-centred development framework. This is not to say that ‘development’ has not always been contested – whether in terms of workers’ struggles, resistance to enslavement or resistance to gender and race inequalities – but it emphasises that modernisation-based liberal approaches have been dominant in international political institutions. Broader questions about development and its relation to poverty and inequality thus have not always been at the forefront of social and political analyses.

Second, debates about development – or, more accurately, under-development – historically have centred upon what was known as the ‘Third World’. Today, however, concepts such as the First, Second and Third World have little analytical utility. This is partly because the idea of the three worlds of development was historically specific. During the [Cold War](#), the First World was identified with the core capitalist [nation](#)-states, the Second World with the nation-states of the socialist bloc and the Third World generally with a coalition of post-colonial nation-states. The last group sought, at least in theory, to pursue a developmental path between the liberal [capitalism](#) of the First World and the state socialism of the Second World. This, however, should not detract from the important accounts of *Third Worldism* as a political project, which refers to attempts to address the injustices and inequalities resulting from colonialism, its legacies and the spread of capitalism (Berger and Weber [2014](#); Weber, [2014](#)).



**Figure 27.1** Slums built on swamp land near a garbage dump in East Cipinang, Jakarta, Indonesia

Despite the passing of the Cold War and the dramatic and uneven transformation of the one-time Third World, the high ground in the development debate continues to implicitly take the idea of ‘developing’ versus developed states as its point of reference. Some observers and institutions engaged in the [theory](#) and practice of development, however, have turned to a more historically informed global perspective on the dynamics of development and inequality, one that seeks to transcend understandings of global poverty and inequality in terms of binaries and spatially defined categories such as ‘developed–developing’, ‘developed–under-developed’, or ‘First World–Third World’ (McMichael [2016](#); Saurin [1995](#)).

We find this latter approach more useful for analysing and understanding global poverty and inequality. This is mainly because the former approach is premised on a [state-centred](#) and somewhat *ahistorical* perspective in the sense that it takes the nation-state as its key analytical referent. This means that development and poverty are conceptualised primarily in terms of the territorial

and spatial categories of conventional International Relations (IR) theory, rather than in terms of social networks and *relations* constituted within a global context. That is to say, approaching development in conventional terms disconnects development as a process from its historically constituted global dimensions, and presents it as ‘an issue’ that should be associated with ‘developing states’. In contrast, we conceptualise development in relational terms, which allows us to treat inequalities and poverty as comprising sets of globally constituted social relations, and thereby avoids analyses in terms of state-centred categories.

## **A relational approach to global poverty, inequality and development**

Often, when we think about conditions of global poverty and inequality, we tend to associate these with a lack of development or the unfulfilled promises of development. This is misleading. Rather, global poverty and inequality are outcomes of a long historical process of uneven global development. This means that there is an intrinsic *relationship* between development and inequality. Let us illustrate this briefly. Have you ever wondered why people considered to be very poor often live in slum dwellings on the edge of cities, or sometimes in cities? Have you reflected upon how their condition might have come about? Unless their circumstances have been chosen ‘voluntarily’ (which is generally unlikely), they usually have found themselves living in urban poverty as a result of having been displaced from their rural homes and lands as part of a wider process of modernisation-based national or international development (see [Box 27.2](#)). Often such displacements occur because decisions have been taken at a national level (in coordination with international networks) to build, for instance, large dams,

or mines, so that local, national or regional industrial plants can be facilitated by new energy sources, or through resource extraction. However, not everyone benefits from such a model of development and, more importantly, not everyone subscribes to such a conception of development, not least also because of possible ecological implications.

### **Box 27.2: Terminology**

#### **Modernisation theory**

Modernisation theory (MT) is premised on a stages-of-growth approach to development. From this perspective, all countries and their societies will transcend their specific social, cultural and material forms and converge on the Western liberal model through the mechanism of the market (albeit under the tutelage of the [state](#) – and not necessarily a democratic state – and foreign intervention). MT emerged from the United States in the context of the Cold War, although it has its roots in European philosophical thought about progress more generally.

Modernisation as development generally was accepted by many of the erstwhile ‘Third World’ states. However, they disputed the conditions under which they were to modernise, identifying the legacy of the [colonial](#) and international division of labour as an obstacle (see [Box 27.5](#)). Modernisation theorists, on the other hand, identified ‘domestic’ factors (culture, society and economy) as key obstacles to development. (Hoselitz [1952](#); Rostow [1960](#))

The case of the Narmada Valley dam in India (see [Box 27.3](#)) is just one example that captures the complexity of ongoing power struggles over

development: what it is and how to achieve it. The dam project in question was an ambitious proposal to develop the Narmada River that would, it was estimated, benefit some 50 million people. The costs, on the other hand, include ecological damage and displacement of millions of members of rural communities (including Indigenous groups) who live in villages along the course of the river. It illustrates that conditions of inequality and poverty are neither natural nor given. Rather, they are outcomes of the complex historical and political dynamics of the pursuit of development as a planned project (McMichael [2016](#): 46).

**Box 27.3:** Case study

**Narmada Valley dam, India**

The villagers of Jalsindhi (a group of villages identified for submersion in order for a dam to be constructed in the Narmada Valley, India) did not wish to give up their lifestyle and their cultural links with their ancestral lands. While not totally cut off from the ‘modern’ world, the villages of Jalsindhi were fairly self-sufficient and were living only partly in exchange with the cash economy. In a cash economy, how well one survives materially is contingent upon what one earns in cash. If jobs are scarce, as in many poorer societies, and there is no formal welfare system in place to support the under-employed or unemployed, such persons effectively become destitute. Importantly, displacement and destitution affect not just the material well-being of people, but also their dignity, their senses of identity and belonging, and recognition by others. The identity of the villagers, including their own conception of development, is not valued or understood by the developers, for whom development is the pursuit of modernisation. Resistance to the Narmada

Valley dam project is ongoing, with the villages of Jalsindhi continuing to struggle against their displacement (see [www.narmada.org/gcg/gcg.html](http://www.narmada.org/gcg/gcg.html); see also the documentary *Drowned Out* by Spanner Films, 2002).

Therefore, development is continually contested and infused with relations of **power**, identity, and divergent values or outlooks (see [Box 27.4](#)). We can build on this relational understanding of development to appreciate that global poverty and inequality are outcomes of ongoing historical and political struggles and their implications. While specific examples may be situated locally or nationally, to varying degrees they will have historical roots and political similarities, as well as sometimes quite direct relations with distant locales and peoples. For example, the historical development and modernisation of contemporary European states was facilitated through colonial and **imperial** relations that extended well beyond the territorial boundaries of the modernising imperial states concerned. Similarly, the European encounter with distant peoples not only influenced how Europe developed culturally and materially, but also influenced the development path of its former colonies and protectorates (Cooper [2005](#); Hobson [2004](#)). Neither of these was experienced in an homogeneous way. Thus, for instance, the drive for modernisation in India after independence from Britain in 1947 was grounded significantly in the legacy of the colonial experience. Today, in an increasingly **globalising** world, social relations and experiences are not only more interconnected, but have taken on an even more global dimension (McMichael [2010](#), [2016](#)).

**Box 27.4:** Discussion points

## **Dimensions of poverty and inequality**

In this chapter, we examine the relationship between development on the one hand and poverty and inequality on the other, predominantly through the lens of economic well-being. Indeed, most people will probably associate development, in the first instance, with economic well-being. However, this is not quite accurate: while we do not have the room to discuss this exhaustively, we want to flag some aspects of *relations* of development, poverty and inequality that are too often sidelined.

In the case of the Narmada Valley dam ([Box 27.3](#)), for instance, many of the people displaced are *Indigenous*, and from different ethnic and cultural identities within the state. Their displacement in the name of ‘development’, and their resistance and struggles against expropriation of their lands is an example of how development is contested. In this case, the community values the land not in terms of a commodity to be exploited; rather, the people are in a more complex relationship with nature in such a way that they may see themselves as custodians of the land, *as well as* users of the resources it provides. Similarly, relations among the community may be organised around values other than the kinds of individualism and competition characteristic of market-centred approaches. However, from the perspective of MT, these values and ways of relating are considered to be backward and should be overcome (see [Box 27.2](#)).

The history of development through inequality can only be understood properly if we include struggles over relations of domination in terms of race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality. For example, enslavement and forced labour have played a key role in the history of development, as has the widespread subjugation of women. It is important that we keep these aspects of domination and resistance in development in view as central

elements of our analysis, not least because they cast long-lasting shadows with significant contemporary implications. Therefore, it is imperative to think about development and inequality beyond the lens of economism without necessarily denying the significance of economic entitlements for sustaining dignified livelihoods. A more comprehensive perspective on development and inequality brings out how race and racism, as well as ways of framing others as non-human or inferior, have played significant formative roles in the history of development (see James [2001 \[1938\]](#); Shilliam [2011a](#), [2011b](#)).

By now, you should have some appreciation that there are foundational questions central to debates about development, global poverty and inequality that need to be engaged with – for example, what *is* development, and what is the *relationship* between development and poverty and inequality? Let us now reconnect some of these issues to the [discipline](#) of IR. Today, any introductory course in IR will include at least a basic introduction to concerns about development, global poverty and inequality. It is also likely that these concerns will be set in the context of national and international [security](#) and issues of global governance. You will more than likely be asked to write an essay on such topics, including perhaps one on the MDG or SDG initiatives. The SDGs are one of the most recent approaches adopted globally as a response to international poverty and inequality. This observation already indicates that there is some recognition of a *global* dimension to the everyday and localised lived experiences of poverty and inequality.

Before we expand on the above themes, we should summarise the key points we have made:

- Global poverty and inequality are not natural or inevitable. On the contrary, contemporary problems of inequality and poverty are the outcomes of a long historical process of uneven global development.
- Development in turn is not a natural phenomenon, but a process that is socially and politically organised and contested.
- There is no such thing as an apolitical development perspective or process. How we explain global poverty and inequality is highly political because, ultimately, it has implications for our understanding of the *causes* of poverty, and hence for how we organise political responses to it. This, in turn, will be contingent upon our respective conceptions of development.
- Development is much more than a linear process of material advancement and modernisation. Development and modernisation involve issues of identity and power, and conceptions of justice.

We examine global poverty and inequality in a way that foregrounds these broader issues. Related to the above points about understanding the politics of development, we argue that the method one chooses to evaluate and analyse development also has implications for poverty and inequality. The choice of methods is both contingent upon a prior theory or understanding of poverty and inequality, and intricately related to conceptions of development. As we have suggested, development has always been, and will continue to be, the focus of political and social debate and struggle. The reason for this is that whichever way development is conceptualised and pursued in practice ‘is not just a goal; it is a method of rule’ (McMichael [2016](#): 50). The relevance of these observations for the study of development, global poverty and inequality will become clearer as you proceed through the chapter.

We proceed with an outline of the contemporary context of development and explore this through the example of the MDG and SDG initiatives. There are, of course, any number of ways to introduce the study of global poverty and inequality, particularly when the emphasis is on the history and politics of development. We could, for instance, start with the famous 1949 speech by former US President Harry S. Truman, which for many symbolically, if not substantively, divided the world into the ‘developed’ and the ‘under-developed’ and led to what became known as the Point IV Program. On 20 January 1949, in his inaugural address at the start of his second term as president, Truman concluded by sketching out an expanded [foreign aid](#) policy to assist the ‘freedom-loving nations’ to develop (Berger [2004](#): 43). This was for some a decisive moment in the history of development. However, against the backdrop of our emphasis on taking historical legacies seriously, in this chapter we intend to ‘fast-forward’ our historically informed approach to global poverty and inequality and focus on the MDGs and SDGs of the early twenty-first century. We do not intend to provide a comprehensive account of these initiatives, but it is important to recognise the extent to which contemporary debates about development have come to the fore both in relation to previous debates such as dependency theory and also with regard to contemporary political trends (see [Box 27.5](#)).

### **Box 27.5: Terminology**

#### **Dependency theory**

Dependency theory (DT) argues that the asymmetrical structure of world politics – in particular the way in which the global economy has been organised – is biased in favour of the Western capitalist states. From the perspective of DT, what has been referred to as the Third World has been

inserted into the world economy in a subordinate position as a consequence of [colonialism](#) and the colonial division of labour, which did not change significantly after political independence. There are variants of this argument. The general thrust of dependency theory, however, has been structural, in the sense that the development of capitalism has been theorised as a structural process resulting in uneven and combined development. Inequality and poverty are conceived as inherent to the overall structure of economic development (Amin [1990](#); Frank [1967](#)).

## **From the Millennium Development Goals to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals**

As the world entered the twenty-first century, a new consensus was emerging among key policy-makers and politicians about global poverty and inequality. This new consensus is seen as a departure from the dominant development policies of the 1980s and 1990s. In particular, the new consensus has been presented as a shift away from the [Washington Consensus](#) (see [Box 25.1](#)) advocated by key global institutions such as the World Bank and the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) (see [Chapter 25](#)). The Washington Consensus maintained a focus on macro-political restructuring, such as managing national budgets in a more austere style in the hope this would facilitate ‘economic growth’ in the long run, enable sovereign debt repayments and also reduce poverty. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) gained increasing influence in the 1980s and included policy initiatives such as privatisation, liberalisation and cutbacks on state subsidies for basic staple foods

and other products, and more general welfare programs (see [Box 25.2](#)). In a substantive sense, the Washington Consensus was seen as the best approach to development, which it was hoped would redress the *social* crises of global poverty and inequality.

However, as a consequence of the many negative social and political implications of SAPs, the Washington Consensus came under critical scrutiny from various quarters. In the context of this crisis of legitimacy of development the shift to integrate micro-political experiences with an ostensibly more poverty-focused macro-political governance agenda emerged in a comprehensive way. This entailed a radical shift in the representation of poverty and the articulation of development policy. These important changes were reflected in development policy processes at various levels, particularly at the level of key [multilateral](#) economic institutions, which included the World Bank, the IMF and the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#).

For example, in contrast to their position in the 1980s and 1990s, all three institutions have now come to represent their *raison d'être* in terms of development. The shift in focus from concerns with macro-economic and political processes of development to concerns about the everyday lived experiences of poor people came to be labelled the post-Washington Consensus. This is generally understood to entail two substantive departures from the Washington Consensus. In addition to the foregrounding of concerns about poverty and how to alleviate it, the post-Washington Consensus is generally understood to imply a change in the process of development policy formulation itself. It is assumed that poverty reduction and development policy will not be premised on a pre-set general framework, but rather will be the outcome of context-specific concerns premised on a more inclusive policy-making process. In particular, there was an expectation that there would be more participation and input from 'the global poor' themselves. Thus the thrust of the post-

Washington Consensus approach to development ostensibly gives priority to the ‘voices of the poor’.

Let us briefly consider three key development initiatives that were formalised under the post-Washington Consensus. First, in 1999 the World Bank and the IMF adopted the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) initiative over the previous SAP process. A PRSP is compulsory for countries wishing to access credit from the World Bank and the IMF to finance development. The PRSP sets out a comprehensive national development plan that ought to encompass in an integrated way macro-political aspects of governance with micro-political concerns. This means that a typical PRSP will have policies, including projected expenditure, for various sectors (such as health, education, poverty and so on) set out on the basis of three-to five-year plans. These plans are in turn correlated with the projected national budget (based on anticipated income and expenditure) of the state concerned. The PRSP initiative generally has been represented as a country-specific document that sets poverty reduction as the core objective. To the extent that it focuses on poverty, there is little to disagree with. It is also correct to say that the PRSP initiative goes beyond the SAPs approach, in that it legalises a comprehensive national development plan linking local-level policies to a globally constituted framework for development (see Weber [2006](#)).

Second, in keeping with the consensus that poverty reduction and development are key rationales of multilateral economic institutions (MEIs), the WTO has also committed to this objective. The WTO 2000 Doha Round was represented in terms of a comprehensive ‘development’ agenda.

Third, the MDGs and later the SDGs were also adopted as a way of monitoring concrete outcomes of global development. While there is no doubt that under the post-Washington Consensus, global poverty and inequality have taken centre stage, debates continue over the global politics of development and

poverty (Higgott and Weber [2005](#); Weber [2004](#), [2006](#); Weber and Berger [2009](#)). For this reason, we will not refer to the vision or, most significantly, the practice of development as espoused by MEIs in terms of the post-Washington Consensus, but rather as a reconfigured, while still orthodox, neoliberal-driven modernising approach to development, as this more accurately captures the substantive issues at stake.

Not everyone shares this reconfigured orthodox modernising vision of development and the processes through which it is to be achieved (Munck and O'Hearn [1999](#); Rahnema with Bawtree [1997](#)). For example, the diverse groups that coalesce under the umbrella of the World Social Forum (WSF) exemplify a fairly large and globally constituted alternative [globalisation](#) movement (see [Chapter 28](#)). Within this movement, there are, for instance, peasant organisations who are interested in pursuing ecologically sustainable food production systems that reflect a comprehensively different development vision from the orthodox one (McMichael [2006](#)). To make clear what is at stake in the ongoing debates about development, we now turn to the specific example of the Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals initiative that followed.

### **Perspectives on the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals**

Through a brief examination of divergent perspectives on the MDGs and SDGs (see [Box 25.4](#)), we demonstrate the degree to which these debates are reflective of differences over how development is conceptualised, and over how the root causes of poverty are viewed. The divergent perspectives can be captured through a few select quotations on the MDG initiative, which remain relevant for how the SDGs are thought about and promoted.

For advocates of the MDG initiative – including Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, under whose leadership the United Nations adopted the MDG declaration – it ‘was a seminal event in the history of the United Nations’ (Annan [2005a](#)). Other advocates were cautiously optimistic about the potential value of the MDG initiative, and suggested that the initiative had at least made global poverty a key focus in world politics (Fukada-Parr [2004](#)).

For some critics, the MDG initiative was better conceived as a strategy to further justify and entrench a [neoliberal](#) conception of development, and hence they called for a rejection of the MDG approach (Amin [2006](#); Bond [2006](#)). Thomas Pogge ([2004](#)), on the other hand, argued that it was morally objectionable to focus on reducing a *proportion* of the poor when there were sufficient resources to meet the basic needs of all of humanity. Jeffrey James ([2006](#)), in contrast, cautioned over the MDG emphasis on quantitative goals and targets. While, for advocates, quantifiable targets can demonstrate in a concrete way whether poverty-reduction goals are being achieved, for critics, it displaces what development *ought to be* about. James illustrates his point through a simple example. Primary school enrolment is an MDG target: is this in itself an adequate measure of development? Or should there be a meaningful consideration of the *quality* of the education and what one can do with it? Following Amartya Sen, such critical perspectives place an emphasis on quality of life rather than targeting outcomes per se. These arguments do not deny that poverty and inequality exist, and that we ought to redress the lived experiences of those subject to vulnerabilities. Instead, they resonate with foundational questions about what development actually is about.

These are what we might call the first-order questions that underpin debates about development. Whether we are talking about the PRSPs, or the WTO Doha agenda – or indeed the MDG and SDG initiatives themselves – it is possible to

discern some fundamental differences between the critical and orthodox approaches. On closer examination, these different perspectives can be seen to diverge precisely with reference to first-order questions about development, global poverty and inequality:

- What *is* development?
- What is the *relationship* between development and poverty and inequality?
- Development for *whom*, and for *what purpose*?

Let us extrapolate these differences by carefully considering what is substantively at stake in the divergent perspectives on the MDG and SDG initiatives. Why is it that, for their advocates, the MDG and SDG initiatives reflect seminal steps ahead in world history, while others remain so critical of these initiatives specifically, and the orthodox development and modernisation project underpinning them more generally?

### **Advocates of the MDG and SDG initiatives**

From this perspective, development is broadly conceptualised in terms of modernisation; this approach places faith, for example, in the unambiguous value of modern, scientific knowledge and technology, and accepts that development is to be achieved through the implementation and regulation of forms of private property rights. This entails an intensification of a market-based approach to public goods and services (Weber [2014](#)). Thus the orthodox approach is ultimately premised on expanding a growth-based framework for development, within which individuals (or ‘corporate actors’) can compete to enhance their respective private gains. This perspective is underpinned by a set of foundational assumptions about development and poverty. It assumes that

society comprises atomistic individuals who prioritise individual gain through competition. This view of the world is premised on a perspective that begins with a fixed conception of human beings. They are, in this view, rational agents acting in accordance with individual decisions made on the basis of explicitly economic calculations: profit maximisation and aspiring to high mass consumption. Given that such a conception begins with the individual (or particular interests) rather than society as a whole, poverty and inequality in turn are not conceptualised as outcomes of development (a socially and politically organised system), but rather as outcomes of *individual* failure to successfully pursue development.

From such a perspective, global poverty and inequality are understood not as outcomes of development, but rather as a condition extraneous to the process of development. That is to say, the orthodox conception and theory of development ultimately rest on an *abstraction* from social relations, presupposing an individualistic perspective congruent with private property rights that renders invisible the constitutive social, historical and political contexts and relations.

From this perspective, a social [order](#) that is beset with the injustices of class relations, gender and racial inequalities is treated as if it were ‘given’, rather than socially and politically constructed. Instead of proceeding from the basis of historically specific experiences and struggles, the orthodox proponents of development and modernisation see the promises of development as a linear vision of progress tied to the future. In this sense, the orthodox approach is premised on a specific temporal vision (‘future time’), and also on equally specific spatial stratification (‘methodological territorialism’). The MDG and SDG initiatives exemplify both these observations. They are focused on a future date to realise the promises of development and retain a spatial conception of the political organisation of development to the extent that ‘national development’,

conceived in terms of a stages of growth logic, remains the dominant frame of reference.

### **Critics of the MDG and SDG initiatives**

From the perspective of critics, the MDG and SDG initiatives are not only inappropriate but, more problematically, are actually set to reproduce and entrench global poverty and inequality because the latter remain conceptualised from within an orthodox approach to development. The core of the critique is not so much an outright dismissal of the ostensible intentions to reduce poverty or aspire to sustainable development, but rather is focused on the conceptual and political framework underpinning the goals-oriented approach to achieving this. For the MDGs, for instance, Amin ([2006](#)) argues that the approach does not adequately address the relationship between development and poverty. This critique stands also for the SDGs. Let us consider two points related to this in more detail. For critics, particularly problematic is the way in which the MDG and SDG conceptual framework remains premised on a neoliberal conception of development and associated policy processes (Weber [2014](#)). Just like the MDGs were, the SDGs are to be *realised* through the wider context of the development process, including the PRSP process, with an emphasis placed on the WTO framework, all of which signals that it remains firmly grounded within a set of ‘free market’ policies and strategies. This approach relies on the promises of economic growth rather than redistribution, an orientation that was precisely the cause of much social distress in the 1980s under SAPs (Thomas [2000](#)).

From a critical perspective, such an approach is tantamount to a form of governance based on what Stephen Gill terms ‘disciplinary neoliberalism’, advanced through an associated regulatory framework of ‘[new constitutionalism](#)’ (Gill [2002](#)). This approach is *ahistorical* because it continues

to conceive of development in a way that abstracts from the social relations of power and concrete forms of dispossession it engenders. It does not take into account how development is – and came to be – organised. For instance, the legacies of [colonialism](#), which among other things instituted an asymmetrical international division of labour between the global North and the global South with precarious terms of trade, is not factored into the MDG or SDG conceptual frameworks. The current organisation of the production of goods and services continues to be precarious and impacts adversely on the lived experiences of many. From the perspective of critics, presuming social contexts to be constituted primarily in terms of rational self-interested agents acting in the image of consumption-oriented and profit-maximising individuals is flawed. To understand the politics of inequality and poverty, it is just as important to appreciate the complex nature of development as it is to *historicise* development and inequality. This would entail asking questions about the relationship between knowledge about development and social power relations (Saurin [1996](#)).

## Conclusion

Global poverty and inequality are not new phenomena to international relations, although they may appear so depending on one's theoretical perspective. If we see the world as a system of discrete territorial units (states) then we may find it plausible to consider economic growth as national development to be an appropriate expression of the policy goals of initiatives such as the MDGs or SDGs. On the other hand, while we may accept that it is possible to find some comfort in the narrative of a global system of discrete territorial states, we might also hope to struggle for alternative approaches to development and modernisation. However, under both scenarios, we would be *abstracting* from

the social reality of everyday lived experiences of historical and contemporary social relations, which have configured the *global* project of development and inequality. From such state-centred perspectives, we are unable to account for [transnational](#) relations, which constitute the making of and resistance to global development through inequality. Development implies progress; conventionally conceived as a linear approach, it involves the subordination of the present to the future. Human beings, however, are complex: we *live* the present in relation to memories (real or imagined) of the past and aspirations (real or imagined) of the future. While it can be said that the orthodox and critical perspectives of development both necessarily operate with conceptions of time and space, they nevertheless differ fundamentally. The orthodox approach to the temporal dimension of development is linear, projecting a particular conception of the history of development into the future. The history of development is conceptualised in non-relational terms, spatially and socially. On the other hand, critical perspectives are premised on substantive aspects of the social and political contexts of development. If we are to respond to global poverty and inequality, it is our contention that we must return to first-order questions about development itself. To do so, we would have to engage ultimately with a much wider range of issues than we have been able to deal with in this chapter. In the many dimensions of relations of poverty and inequality, questions of culture, identity, race and ethnicity are central, as are questions of material and symbolic power, and problems related to conceptions of time and space. We have focused more on the economic dimensions of development and inequality, but we hope that we have also given you a sense of the significance of relations of race and gender, for example, as important dimensions of domination and resistance in the politics of development.

## Discussion questions

27.1 What differentiates orthodox and alternative approaches to development?

27.2 What is the relationship between conceptions of development and the methods that are used to analyse development?

27.3 How are poverty and development related?

27.4 To what extent are assumptions about development relevant for how we respond to poverty?

### *Further reading*

Berger, Mark T. 2004, *The battle for Asia: From decolonization to globalization*, London: Routledge Curzon. *A detailed overview of the history of theory and practice of international development from the end of World War II to the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and beyond.*

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Berger, Mark T. and Weber, Heloise 2014, *Rethinking the Third World: International development and world politics*, London: Palgrave. *An overview and analysis of development theory that offers a rethinking of the Third World.*

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McMichael, Philip (ed.) 2010, *Contesting development: Critical struggles for social change*, London: Routledge. *Brings together a rich and diverse collection of essays that foregrounds development as a relational, social and political process; presents the contradictions of development and the struggles for social change.*

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McMichael, Philip 2016, *Development and social change: A global perspective*, 6th ed., London: Sage. *An engaging and accessible account of the history of development that challenges the reader to rethink problematic assumptions*

*about development.*

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Rahnema, Majid with Bawtree, Victoria (eds) 1997, *The post-development reader*, London: Zed Books. *An unconventional collection of essays on development and poverty; challenging and inspiring.*

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Weber, Heloise (ed.) 2014, *The politics of development: A survey*. London: Routledge. *Brings together a collection of critical essays on themes and topics highly relevant for understanding the politics of global development and inequality.*

# Globalisation and its critics



**Steven Slaughter**

[Introduction](#)

[Understanding globalisation](#)

[Anti-capitalist politics](#)

[Scholarly critiques of globalisation](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Discussion questions](#)

[Further reading](#)

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the contemporary political debates surrounding [\*\*globalisation\*\*](#). It illustrates the main features of protests against the social consequences of a globalised economy, and it identifies some of the key political issues that scholars and students of International Relations (IR) must face when addressing the promotion of justice and effective governance within a more densely connected world.

Introduced in the mid-1990s, the term ‘globalisation’ has entered common usage and become a central issue in public debates in most countries around the world. Globalisation has come to be associated with the controversial social outcomes that have stemmed from an increasingly integrated global economy, and the resulting public disquiet and controversy around the world, particularly as symbolised by the 1999 protests in Seattle against the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#). This controversy has continued in the form of more recent protests in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2008–09. Globalisation has also become an important – although essentially contested – concept within the field of IR and other social science [disciplines](#). It is therefore essential to understand what globalisation means.

## Understanding globalisation

Globalisation is a messy term that encompasses a wide variety of human activity. As you may be aware, there are trade statistics and other economic facts that suggest the world is becoming increasingly globally integrated (Held and McGrew [2007](#)). Nevertheless, facts do not tell the whole story. Consequently, in an effort to systematise the examination of globalisation, a variety of scholars have advanced arguments about what globalisation means. The seminal globalisation work, *Global Transformations*, offers a systematic study of the history and nature of globalisation and suggests three explanations for contemporary global integration (Held et al. [1999](#)) (see [Box 28.1](#)). The first is *hyperglobalisation*, a position held by liberals like Kenichi Ohmae ([1995](#)), who claims that globalisation represents a recent and near-complete triumph of liberal values and global markets that is tightly integrating [states](#) and people around the

world. Such researchers argue that globalisation is a significant force for human progress.

### **Box 28.1: Terminology**

#### **Three explanations of globalisation**

##### ***Hyperglobalist***

Globalisation is:	Real and new.
Why?	Globalisation is the consequence of information and communications technology as well as <a href="#">capitalism</a> .
Main elements:	Global economy.
Role of the state:	End of effective state capacity.
Moral stance:	Positive process.
Proponents:	Thomas Friedman, <i>The Lexus and the Olive Tree</i> ( <a href="#">1999</a> ); Kenichi Ohmae, <i>The End of the Nation State</i> ( <a href="#">1995</a> ).

##### ***Sceptical***

Globalisation is:	Nothing new – either is not real or is a long-standing process.
Why?	Globalisation is a myth – there is a continuing international economy.
Main elements:	Capitalism as usual.
Role of the state:	Persistence of state capacity for policy-making.
Moral stance:	Globalisation is imaginary.
Proponents:	Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, <i>Globalization in Question</i> ( <a href="#">1996</a> ); Linda Weiss, <i>The Myth of the Powerless State</i> ( <a href="#">1998</a> ).

##### ***Transformationalist***

Globalisation is:	A real but long-standing spatial process.
Why?	Long-term processes of technology, ideas and

	institutions have stretched human activity across time and space.
Main elements:	Globalisation is a multifaceted social process – different aspects of life are becoming global in varying degrees.
Role of the state:	State capacity is undergoing transformation. The line between the foreign and domestic policy has become blurred.
Moral stance:	An ambiguous process that is producing both ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, as well as reconstituting traditional political communities.
Proponents:	David Held et al., <i>Global Transformations</i> ( <a href="#">1999</a> ); David Held and Anthony McGrew, <i>Globalisation/Anti-globalisation</i> ( <a href="#">2007</a> ).

The second position is a *sceptical* set of observations that suggest globalisation is overstated and largely a myth because the level of global integration during the 1990s is less than in the period between 1870 and 1914 (Hirst and Thompson [1996](#): 2). Far from being a world where markets have trumped states, the world economy is still shaped by state-to-state interaction; there remain significant differences between the strategic choices made by various states in response to the world economy and strong states are still ‘able to work the system to their advantage’ (Waltz [1999](#): 7). **Marxists** are also sceptical, on the grounds that global interconnections are an essential part of the capitalist mode of production; globalisation is seen as a ‘long standing process always implicit in capital accumulation rather than a political-economic condition that has recently come into being’ (Harvey [1997](#): 421).

The third account of globalisation is the *transformationalist* perspective, which seeks to locate globalisation in a more historical framework and has become the predominant explanation of globalisation. The transformationalist

position conceives globalisation as a spatial process whereby various forms of human activity increasingly are traversing the world and connecting people in differing parts of it more densely and more quickly than in previous times. This spatial interconnectedness is largely due to developments in transportation and communications technology that enable long-distance social relations. Anthony Giddens (1990: 64) exemplifies this account when he defines globalisation as ‘the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’. In this process, national borders are transcended on a regular basis by various flows of resources, people and ideas. It is important to emphasise that this account contends that globalisation is multifaceted, in that it is not restricted to the economic realm alone, as people increasingly are affected by various forms of economic, cultural and political activity. Equally important, the transformationalist position argues that globalisation is not novel to the late twentieth century, as individuals and polities have been interconnecting across the world for at least 500 years, with some dynamics of globalisation evident even earlier.

There are three main political implications of this spatial process for world politics. First, while [nation](#)-states remain important actors in world politics, global connections and the development of communications technology have empowered a range of transnational actors to operate in politically significant ways (Held and McGrew 2007: Chapter 7). Clearly, globalisation has made it easier to develop civil society organisations (CSOs) and [non-government organisations \(NGOs\)](#) that promote and disseminate certain political values, but it has also made it easier for [terrorist](#) groups and organised crime to transfer people, resources and harm across national borders. [Transnational corporations](#) have also been greatly empowered – if not enabled – by these accelerated forms of global linkage. Second, globalisation leads to global

connections and ramifications that are more authentically transnational and universal. Indeed,

political communities and civilisations can no longer be characterised simply as ‘discrete worlds’: they are enmeshed and entrenched in complex structures of overlapping forces, relations and movements ... But even the most powerful among them – including the most powerful nation-states – do not remain unaffected by the changing conditions and processes of regional and global entrenchment (Held et al. [1999](#): 77–80).

However, these overlapping forces are often uneven and have greater local or regional implications for some people or states. For instance, the GFC of 2008–09 demonstrated the interconnected nature of economic systems but had different economic and social impacts around the world. Consequently, the lines between foreign and domestic policy have blurred due to the intense and widespread forms of global integration and connection. This leads to issues such as terrorism, organised crime and environmental impact that intersect national borders and thereby can only be addressed by elaborate international cooperation.

Third, as a result of the previous points, there are increasingly complex forms of international and transnational cooperation that have become referred to as ‘global governance’. The previous points create a situation in which the nation-state cannot be assumed to be the only major political actor in issues like [security](#), economic prosperity, or environmental sustainability. It is now the case that international or intergovernmental forms of organisations, such as the [United Nations \(UN\)](#), the Group of Twenty ([G20](#)), regional bodies like the European Union or non-public bodies like transnational corporations, business councils and CSOs, are increasingly important to understanding the enactment of policy-making. Jan Aart Scholte ([2005](#): 138–9) indicates that these public and private bodies are ‘supraterritorial constituencies’ that are external influences

over the operation of state policy-making. As we will see in the last section of this chapter, this is problematic because it can be seen to undermine [democracy](#) within nation-states.

It is important to be aware that some scholars are sceptical about the incidence or significance of the spatial implications of globalisation. As I mentioned previously, sceptics claim the [power](#) of the state is still largely intact – and there is plenty of evidence, especially in the post-9/11 context, to demonstrate the power of the state. Even transformationalist scholars argue that globalisation is not a monolithic force: different states and groups of people are affected by global integration in differing ways. However, there are also scholars who believe that, while the spatial implications of contemporary global integration may be largely correct, they ignore any examination of the ideas and interests that are dominating and championing the contemporary shape of global economic integration. Some critically minded scholars (see [Chapter 4](#)) emphasise the importance of *neoliberal* and free market capitalist ideologies and policies in shaping the way the global economy has developed since the 1970s (Cox [1997](#); Gill [2012](#)).

[Neoliberalism](#) (also known as economic [rationalism](#)) is a strand of liberal thought that advances a range of policies ushered in by many Western – especially Anglo-Saxon – countries and the [multilateral](#) economic institutions (MEIs), such as the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) and the [World Bank](#) (see [Chapter 25](#)). Neoliberalism is an ideology and philosophy based on the principle that human welfare is best promoted by economic growth, which in turn is best enabled by reducing the interference of governments in the private sector. Neoliberals also support measures that enable trade and finance to have unrestricted movement across national borders. These policies attempt to ‘roll back’ the state and the role of government, and leave decisions about allocation, production and distribution in the economy to the global market, thereby limiting

the capacity of democracy to substantially regulate economic life (Crouch [2011](#)). These ‘market-friendly’ policies are evident in the policies of *deregulation*, which remove ‘political’ interferences and rules from the operation of markets; *privatisation*, which entails the sale of state assets to the private sector or the ‘contracting out’ of public services to the private sector; and the *liberalisation* of restrictions on the movements of capital or trade across state borders.

Neoliberals claim that an unregulated market is the best way to promote individual freedom and increase global economic growth, which will ultimately benefit – and ‘trickle down’ – to everyone. These policies have been influential around the world and replaced the more moderate [Keynesian](#) liberalism that sought economic growth and social stability by allowing an active domestic role for the state. In practical terms, neoliberal ideas underpinned the formation of the ‘Washington Consensus’ orthodoxy of the MEIs in the 1980s (see [Chapter 25](#)), expressing a view articulated by the US Government and development economists that neoliberal policies were the only path to prosperity and development. This orthodoxy has been evident in the policies of the IMF and World Bank – especially the policies of structural adjustment – in directing developing countries to introduce neoliberal measures and actively open their domestic economies to global capitalism.

Consequently, we can see a close relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary processes of global integration. Indeed, the hyperglobalist position best captures the perspective of many Western governments, which conceive of globalisation as an inexorable economic force. From the early 1980s onwards, globalisation was seen as an external technological and economic force compelling countries around the world to adjust their economic policies, largely through liberalisation and deregulation. This idea of globalisation being a monolithic external force was challenged by scholars who claimed that governments have used the idea of ‘globalisation’ to mask the neoliberal agenda

driving economic policy (Cox [1997](#); Gill [2012](#)). While it is now generally accepted that globalisation is a broader phenomenon encompassing more than just economics, there is no doubt that neoliberal ideas and policy-making are an important component of political life at a national and global level. Furthermore, even after GFC and the apparent failures of liberalised finance, neoliberalism still remains largely predominant (Crouch [2011](#); Gill [2012](#)).

At the global level, there have been mounting efforts by states to manage globalisation. The [G8](#) and the [G20](#) forums have played central roles in managing global forms of economic and social integration. The ‘G’ system has its origins in the 1970s, when the leading industrialised democracies created an annual forum for executive-level deliberations to coordinate policy in respect to economic and social issues. As a forum for finance ministers, the G20 has its origins in the late 1990s response to instability in the global financial system, as demonstrated by the Asian financial crisis. The role of the G20 continued to grow, and it replaced the G8 as the pre-eminent site for economic diplomacy in 2009 in response to the GFC.

The G20 plays a crucial role in stabilising globalisation, and in coordinating the actions of states and international organisations to address global crises when they arise. There is a sense that the G20 fills a glaring gap in global governance. An important aspect of the G20’s role in global governance is that its membership has expanded beyond Western states to include emerging economic powers such as China, India and Brazil (see [Box 28.2](#)). Furthermore, while the G8 and G20 have a clear focus on economic issues, these forums have addressed a range of non-economic issues – from terrorism to global warming and global health – with mixed results. The potential of the G20 to address an array of issues broader than promoting global capitalism, or coordinating responses to economic crises, points to the potential significance of creating and sustaining a body that plays a coordination role in global governance that addresses social

issues and promotes global public goods. However, despite this broadening agenda, many observers claim that the ‘G’ system has played – and continues to play – an important role in articulating and legitimating neoliberal principles (Beeson and Bell [2009](#): 69).

**Box 28.2: Discussion points**

**Timeline of the ‘G’ system of forums**

G6 – 1975: Executive leaders (i.e. the presidents or prime ministers of member states) from France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

G7 – 1976: Canada added.

G8 – 1997: Russia added.

G20 Finance Ministers – 1999: The G20 is made up of the finance ministers and central bank governors of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Republic of Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union.

G20 Leaders Forum – 2009: At the 2009 meeting it was announced that the G20 had replaced the G8 as the central forum for executive leaders.

The focus of neoliberal ideas and policies is on unleashing innovation, profitability and economic growth through encouraging unimpeded transnational

economic linkages, and this has influenced the direction of contemporary globalisation. The impact of neoliberalism is also evident in the rising tide of public concern over its social consequences and implications. While trade liberalisation can promote public disquiet – because jobs are often affected and the losers in this scenario tend to be more vocal than the winners – during the 1990s the Western world shifted its focus towards a broader concern for global justice. This concern broadened further in the 2000s when the instability of deregulated globalisation was evident in the GFC. This public concern is an indication that globalisation as a spatial process had impacted on public awareness and that neoliberal policies have some unpalatable social implications. We now turn to the substance of these public concerns and protests.

## **Anti-capitalist politics**

Although CSOs like Oxfam and Greenpeace have been interested in the global economy for many years, and people in developing parts of the world have likewise contested the policies of the IMF for some decades, since the mid-1990s the response of individuals and CSOs concerned with global social justice has grown exponentially in both number and voice. It has become common to refer to these protests as a social movement – the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement – or, more accurately, the ‘anti-capitalist movement’ (ACM). However, the unity of this movement is open to debate. The ACM is a global social movement (or collection of movements) that challenges the domination of transnational corporate interests and neoliberal/free market policies because of the perceived impact of this type of global capitalism on social justice and democracy. Sometimes this movement is referred to as the ‘global justice movement’.

Ultimately, the groups involved in this movement seek to challenge the orthodoxy of trade liberalisation and neoliberalism, which exclude efforts to regulate and redistribute economic activity (Pleyers [2010](#)). They do not accept the economic assumptions and arguments associated with neoliberalism, and they see that economic gain and the interests of market actors need to be considered along with other public goals such as good labour standards, environmental protection and [human rights](#). They claim that the defenders of neoliberalism and [free trade](#) frequently fail to acknowledge the needs of vulnerable people around the world in favour of the economic interests of the affluent (Pleyers [2010](#)).

While most people became aware of the ACM with the protests against the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999, the real beginnings of the movement against global capitalism began in 1994 with the Zapatista struggle against neoliberalism. On 1 January 1994, a grassroots rebellion in the impoverished southern Mexican state of Chiapas began against the introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a regional treaty animated by explicit neoliberal principles. While the Zapatistas employed some forms of active resistance, the true impact of the movement was its explicit recognition of the importance of challenging neoliberal ideas and effective use of the internet to communicate their cause. This played a crucial role in mobilising a wide variety of campaigns from around the world on the question of neoliberalism. These events were followed by a global internet campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), an agreement being devised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in secrecy from 1995, with the aim of applying trade liberalisation principles to the realm of investment. It was feared by those in and beyond the ACM that this would have eliminated the right of states to control democratically many aspects of policy-making, such as regulated working conditions or environmental standards

(Goodman and Ranald [1999](#): 34). Once a copy of the MAI draft treaty was leaked on the internet, it catalysed a worldwide campaign that exacerbated the differences within the OECD and in 1998 negotiations collapsed, leading to the treaty being scrapped.

The successful anti-MAI campaign was quickly followed up by large-scale physical protests at Seattle in 1999 and other meetings of MEIs during the 2000s (see [Box 28.3](#)). The 9/11 terrorist attacks had a significant impact on the ACM, with the political climate moving away from social justice concerns. However, the social and political aftermath of the GFC in 2008–09 reinvigorated the ACM and led to the development of the Occupy Wall Street protests in America, which spread globally as the Occupy Movement. This movement denounced the power of corporations over democracy, fiscal austerity, corporate bailouts and rising inequality (Bray [2014](#)). While it had difficulty in sustaining its protests, it attracted considerable attention to confronting the overbearing power of ‘the 1 per cent’ in the wake of the GFC.

### **Box 28.3: Discussion points**

#### **A brief timeline of the global anti-capitalist movement**

January 1994:	EZLN (Zapatista) revolt against North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) begins in Chiapas, Mexico.
1998:	Internet-coordinated protests publicising details of secret negotiations on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) bring about their collapse.
December 1999:	60 000–80 000 people from around the world demonstrate as part of the Day of Global Action at the WTO meeting in Seattle.
September 2000:	20 000 people protest against World Bank and IMF in Prague; and more than 20 000 protest against the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Melbourne.

July 2001:	During protests by 200 000 people against the Group of 8 (G8) meeting in Genoa, the police kill one protester.
September 2004:	Protests against the WTO in Cancun; WTO dialogue between the member states stalls and collapses (again).
July 2005:	Protests are held against the G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland; the Live 8 concerts and the 'Make Poverty History' campaign.
April 2009:	Protests are held against the London G20 summit.
September 2011:	Occupy Wall Street protests begin and spread globally as the Occupy Movement.



**Figure 28.1** A sign from the Occupy protests, 2011

An important development for the ACM occurred in January 2001, when the World Social Forum (WSF) was created in Porto Alegre in Brazil. The WSF was created as a political space to discuss and formulate alternatives to neoliberal globalisation and thus challenge the ideas of the WEF, which meets annually in Davos, Switzerland and intermittently in other places. The WSF annual meetings have grown in size, and in 2006 there were simultaneous meetings in Mali, Venezuela and Pakistan. Furthermore, in 2015 the Internet

Social Forum (ISF) was created as an online space that reflects the WSF's purpose and activity (see [Box 28.4](#)).

**Box 28.4:** Discussion points

**The World Social Forum at a glance**

The WSF is not a formal organisation, but:

... an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the earth (World Social Forum [2002](#)).

Source: <https://fsm2016.org/en/sinformer/a-propos-du-forum-social-mondial>

There continue to be significant differences within the ACM over the goals of protest and the tactics that should be utilised. There are groups that advocate violence and vandalism against capitalist icons, those who support non-violent protests and those who wish to engage in constructive dialogue with transnational corporations and the MEIs. There are socialist groups that aspire to move beyond capitalism and some groups that seek to reform the capitalist system. However, while the diversity and global extent of the protest movement speak volumes about the social problems facing the world and the diversity of moral viewpoints of those resisting neoliberalism, developing political coherence amidst such diversity is the most significant challenge facing the protest movement. It is important, too, to note that the ACM itself has been

actively countered by the MEIs and the many pro-capitalist business councils and lobby groups that continue to play an important role in supporting the development of globalised capitalism. There are, as Leslie Sklair ([1997](#)) points out, ‘social movements for global capitalism’ in developing and defending globalised capitalism. Economists and business councils play a crucial role in supporting and legitimating neoliberal ideas and the type of global capitalism we take for granted.

Also, while there has not yet been a momentous transformation in the economic orthodoxy away from neoliberalism, the impact of the ACM’s contestation is not insignificant. It is clear that the protest movements have brought the structure and neoliberal policies of the MEIs to world attention, when previously they were not significant topics of public consideration. The protest movement has politicised the global economy and opened up some avenues for dissenting ideas and voices by making it clear that contemporary globalisation is a political and cultural structure as much as an economic one. The ACM has essentially politicised the ideas and private bodies that stand behind the institutional infrastructure of contemporary globalisation, such that corporate think tanks and transnational business councils have been taken out of the realm of conspiracy theory and placed into the discourse of any reasonable explanation of the contours of contemporary globalisation. The increasing attention paid to the social and institutional underpinnings of prosperity by the MEIs can also be seen to reflect a reaction to outside voices as much as internal learning processes inside the MEIs (O’Brien et al. [2000](#): 228) (see [Chapter 25](#)). In some cases, the ACM has frustrated and slowed the development of the [institutionalisation](#) of neoliberalism. The Seattle protest and the anti-MAI campaigns are examples of protests that amplified the divisions *within* the intergovernmental negotiations, and that consequently were successful at slowing down the institutional growth of neoliberal globalisation. By contrast,

the more recent activity of the Occupy Movement has had less tangible impacts on the way that neoliberalism and globalisation have continued to develop (Bray [2014](#)).

However, there have also been other forms of anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation in various forms of nationalist and populist backlash against globalisation and global governance. This type of response involves an array of conservative and far right groups that are suspicious of globalisation and global governance because they are fearful of external political and economic forces and therefore argue for forms of economic protectionism (Held and McGrew [2007](#): 197–9). While some of these reactions against globalisation have specific national dynamics, the signs of far-right politics have been evident in many places around the world – especially since the GFC. In Europe, we have also seen increased forms of xenophobia and the mobilisation of right-wing groups in response to fears about Muslim immigration and claims that the European Union has overbearing power. In America, the election of Donald Trump also related to elements of the American public that felt the economic impact of free trade had led to the loss of ‘blue-collar’ jobs to other countries. These manifestations of nationalist ‘backlash politics’ are evidence of the insecurity harboured by some people who feel buffeted by globalising forces, which are exacerbated in times of economic crisis, and who seek some comfort in calls for some form of autarchic nationalism or protectionism.

The significance and future prospects of these public concerns about global capitalism depend heavily upon how the ideas and arguments of the ACM and the nationalist backlash are interpreted by citizens around the world, and especially upon how powerful political and economic actors respond to the social problems and concerns that are directly or indirectly connected to global capitalism. The future of these political movements – and indeed of globalisation itself – also depends heavily upon what we consider as being the appropriate

political structures that should be maintained or developed in the future. Should we develop extensive forms of global democracy or protect state [sovereignty](#)? Consequently, questions of IR [theory](#) and political theory are tremendously significant to the future shape of globalisation.

## **Scholarly critiques of globalisation**

One of the core issues facing IR scholars – and indeed everyone on our planet – is how we are to organise political authority and effective governance within the context of globalisation. Despite significant public disquiet about the type of globalisation that currently exists, the fact remains that over the past two or three decades various forms of international cooperation and governance have developed so that global capitalism and other forms of global integration are able to secure their existence. The role of non-state actors has also increased. These forms of international and transnational governance, coupled with processes of economic and cultural globalisation, have called into question the nation-state's future role in a world system that promotes stability or justice. We are witnessing a double displacement of state authority – towards private market influences and towards global and regional bodies that are external to any state. There are real questions about whether states around the world – even the most powerful – can control their domestic affairs in the face of globalised structures and forces.

Consequently, in IR literature the idea of 'cosmopolitan democracy' has become a significant conjectural alternative to contemporary globalisation. Contemporary scholars such as David Held ([1995](#), [1998](#)) argue that we need to institutionalise the idea that people are 'citizens of the world'. While the idea of [cosmopolitanism](#) has been around for some time as a moral stance (see [Chapter](#)

8), the rising significance of globalisation has led cosmopolitans to be more forthright in their political support for global institutions and a single global democratic space. They contend that the various processes of globalisation have fundamentally limited the capacity of the nation-state to have any real sense of control over its destiny because its populace is now routinely affected by ‘outside’ decisions and forces (Falk [1995](#); Held [1995](#)). Held ([1998](#): 21) claims that ‘the idea of a political community of fate – of a self-determining collectivity which forms its own agenda and life conditions – can no longer meaningfully be located within the boundaries of a single nation-state alone’. In the context of globalisation, cosmopolitans argue that the only way to overcome these disjunctures is for decision-making processes to include everyone who stands to be affected by them, thereby making the appropriate site for democracy, at least on some issues, a global one. In pursuing this alternative and globally extending democracy *across* states’ borders, the state and other actors such as transnational corporations will increasingly be bound by global laws and standards (Held [1995](#): 234–5), and individuals – not states – will be the primary moral and political agents in world politics.

Obviously, there are many critics of cosmopolitan proposals and a diverse range of positions with regard to how we could democratise global politics (Bray and Slaughter [2015](#); Held and McGrew [2007](#)). After all, the idea of global democracy seems a far-fetched and [utopian](#) attempt at world government. While the proponents of cosmopolitan democracy suggest that we need to think creatively about a more just form of global [order](#), the [communitarian](#) critics of cosmopolitanism and some social democrats claim that cosmopolitans understate the power and utility of national forms of identity, solidarity and loyalty (Miller [1999](#)). More particularly, communitarian and republican critics claim that a global democracy is not necessary for global cooperation and that citizens of democratic states ought instead to direct their states to be more just and

cooperative with respect to the forms of foreign policy and governance established by these states (Slaughter [2005](#)). Transnational applications of deliberative democratic theory and radical democratic theory have also been active in arguing for the possibility of more fluid transnational forms of deliberation and overlapping forms of social interaction as preferable to either the nation-state or a centralised electoral system of global democracy (Bray and Slaughter [2015](#): Chapters 5 and 7).

While it is easy to be critical of the feasibility of cosmopolitan democracy, it is harder to be critical of calls to promote an increased concern for human rights at home and abroad. It is also difficult to dismiss the claim that global forms of deliberation between people from different civilisations, nation-states and belief systems are needed to justly and effectively manage globalisation (Dryzek [2006](#)). In some respects, the activity noted earlier in the form of the ACM and CSOs interested in globalisation have begun these global forms of deliberation. In terms of the future, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we need new forms of governance and political community, and while cosmopolitan claims may not square with the political realities of a world where nation-states are still predominant, cosmopolitans are posing important questions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has indicated the variety of ways in which globalisation is becoming increasingly important to our everyday lives. Contemporary globalisation entails a blurring of local, national and world politics. Neoliberal policy-making's emphasis on promoting economic growth and excluding efforts to regulate or redistribute economic activity is having profound effects around the world, and is provoking public concern about whether this is the path to a

sustainable and socially just future. This chapter has also illuminated the ways in which ordinary people around the world have become engaged with the question of how global political life should be organised in the hope of promoting a more just and stable world. Consequently, the level of our knowledge of world politics and our stance in relation to how we could achieve effective governance and justice are fundamental questions to us as citizens and as students, given that we live a shared future in an increasingly globalised world.

## **Discussion questions**

**28.1** Do you think the hyperglobalists, the sceptics or the transformationalists provide the better account of globalisation?

**28.2** Why has contemporary globalisation stimulated so much resistance? Is this resistance justified?

**28.3** Why has democracy become such a central issue in globalisation debates?

**28.4** Do protests against globalisation make a difference? If so, how?

**28.5** Has the position of the anti-capitalist movement been strengthened by the GFC?

**28.6** Do protests against globalisation reflect cosmopolitan or communitarian sentiment?

## *Further reading*

Bray, Daniel and Slaughter, Steven 2015, *Global democratic theory: A critical introduction*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *A comprehensive account of the impact of globalisation and global governance on democracy.*

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Dryzek, John 2006, *Deliberative global politics: Discourse and democracy in a divided world*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *Applies the theory of deliberative democracy to world politics, including intractable conflicts.*

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Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio 2004, *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*, London: Penguin. *A radical and popular account of democratic resistance to globalisation as a form of empire.*

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Held, David and McGrew, Anthony 2007, *Globalisation/anti-globalisation*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Polity Press. *A wide-ranging discussion of globalisation and the anti-globalisation movements it has provoked.*

# Terrorism



**Audrey Kurth Cronin**

[Introduction](#)

[When and why did this issue become important to the study of International Relations?](#)

[What are the major issues and debates in the study of terrorism?](#)

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## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the long history, nature and significance of terrorism for International Relations (IR). It first addresses the topic's recent prominence. Terrorism is by no means the most brutal type of violence, especially in comparison with wars in which states have killed millions of

people. But it garners outsized attention through its symbolic nature. Only by educating ourselves can we rob terrorism of the source of its power. Second, it addresses key academic debates, which always go back to the definition. The chapter argues that there are core areas of international agreement about what a terrorist act is, and that it can and should be distinguished from other types of violence. Third, it lays out intellectual frameworks that help us understand and analyse terrorism, including types of terrorism, historical patterns and the strategies used by terrorist groups. The chapter concludes with reflections about what is at stake in countering this type of illegitimate act.

Terrorist violence is an enduring part of the human experience. Its ancient roots are traceable at least back to the first century CE, when the Jewish Sicarii publicly killed prominent men in Jerusalem with knives (*sica*) and terrorised the population of Judea. Yet the word ‘terrorism’, with its pejorative connotations, is contested. Some people think it is so contentious that we should not use it at all. Unfortunately, that would make it impossible to study, and no one denies that terrorism exists.

Another way to think about the concept of terrorism in international relations is to consider it as complicated as the words ‘war’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘revolution’. All of them reflect their political and historical contexts. They all have grey areas about which people argue, as well as core elements upon which there is consensus. At its heart, and regardless of whether we agree with the *causes* behind its use, terrorism is an act of illegitimate violence that hurts innocent people and violates long-standing legal and moral norms.

## **When and why did this issue become important to the study of International Relations?**

The study of terrorism predates the establishment of International Relations as an academic discipline, but it has never been as distinct and prominent it is now. Initially, terrorism was an interdisciplinary topic cutting across older disciplines such as history, economics, sociology, philosophy and political theory. It was not a stand-alone subject, and most scholars treated it as a type of political crime.

During most of the twentieth century, other types of violence killed far more people than terrorism did, so they gained more attention and priority. This was especially true of the study of war. To put things in perspective, World War I (1914–18) killed about seventeen million people and World War II (1939–45) killed about sixty million people. The August 1945 nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki alone killed some 200 000 people. By comparison, in a period of forty years (1970–2010), about 3500 people died from terrorist attacks in the United States (START [2011](#)). Expanding our focus to the entire world (and admitting gaps in reliable data), the number of people who have died from terrorist attacks annually from 2000–15 is well below 18 000 (Global Terrorism Database). Studying the dynamics of state violence has been historically more important than studying terrorism, because one wrong move by a major nuclear power could kill millions of people *instantly*. It is no wonder that, for most of the twentieth century, policy-makers and academics focused on state violence instead.

But one of the purposes of terrorism is to evoke fear, and that is why its impact transcends its death toll. To heighten fear, there must be an audience, so some form of public communication is essential. The launching of the first television satellite in 1968 was an important marker for what we are experiencing today (Hoffman [2006](#): 178). In the absence of media attention, terrorist attacks are hard to differentiate from murder. Unfortunately, the more people who are aware of an attack, the more shock and potential power terrorism seems to have.

The 1972 Munich Olympics attack was a watershed for the modern study of terrorism, as the violence was transmitted via global television networks to some 900 million viewers. In the midst of the Summer Olympics, eight Palestinian operatives crept into the Olympic Village and stormed the rooms of sleeping Israeli athletes, killing two and taking nine of them hostage. In return for the Israeli athletes' release, the terrorists, who were part of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's (PLO) Black September group, demanded freedom for hundreds of prisoners and safe passage to a friendly Arab country. After fifteen hours of negotiation, the tense standoff devolved into a fireflight at a German air base, where the Palestinians killed all of the remaining Israeli hostages. A West German policeman and five of the eight Palestinians also perished. A global audience that had tuned in to watch Olympic sprinters, swimmers, gymnasts and weight lifters instead witnessed a real-time massacre.

The Munich operation was a disaster that failed to achieve its stated goals, and leaders around the world quickly condemned it. Yet it had a different long-term effect. Before the Munich Olympics, no one seemed to care about the Palestinians. Their cause had been marginalised for some 25 years. After the massacre, everyone knew what the PLO was. Soon Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was invited to address the UN General Assembly, the PLO achieved UN special observer status, and dozens of countries opened diplomatic ties with the group (Hoffman [2006](#): 69–71). This counter-intuitive, and in many respects deeply cynical, outcome grabbed the attention of graduate students and scholars. Soon academics were studying terrorism as a separate subject, especially in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, but also Northern Ireland, Western Europe and the United States.

The academic field grew further in 1995, when the Japanese doomsday group Aum Shinrikyo used sarin nerve gas to attack the Tokyo subway, killing thirteen commuters and injuring thousands. The group's shocking and widely

publicised attack heightened fear that other terrorist groups around the world might follow suit and use so-called weapons of mass destruction – meaning nuclear, chemical, biological and radiological weapons – against civilians. More scholars turned their attention to the threat of ‘WMD terrorism’, especially established weapons experts, who now focused their attention on terrorist groups as well. By the turn of the century, scholars and policy-makers were highly sensitised to the intersection between terrorism and weapons of mass destruction – especially nuclear weapons. They feared that terrorists might be able to carry out devastating attacks that had previously been confined to states.

Then al-Qaeda attacked the United States on 11 September 2001 (9/11). Four commercial airliners filled with hundreds of passengers ploughed into the World Trade Center’s twin towers in New York City, the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia and a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, instantly killing nearly 3000 people. As the tragedy unfolded on television and over the internet, terrorism again transfixed ordinary people around the world.



**Figure 29.1** The 9/11 memorial

The 2001 operation was a shocking demonstration of the power of surprise attack by a [non-state actor](#) against the strongest military power on earth. It heightened fear of more mass-casualty attacks. The result was an enormous increase in every kind of attention to terrorism, including a surge in the number of academics focusing on it, along with more funding than ever before for every kind of counter-terrorism-related enterprise. Before 9/11, terrorism comprised a minor sub-set of security studies. After 9/11, it gained independence, resources

and academic legitimacy – especially in the United States and Europe. Today, there are terrorism study programs in countries from Australia to Bangladesh, China to Singapore, Egypt to Israel and well beyond (Freedman [2010](#)). The number of journals focusing on terrorism has expanded from two to around forty, and the number of terrorism-related books and articles has multiplied exponentially (Bullis and Irving [2013](#)). Hundreds of thousands of people worldwide now teach and learn about terrorism as a separate subject within the discipline of IR.

## **What are the major issues and debates in the study of terrorism?**

### **The definition of terrorism**

The definition of terrorism is a constant source of disagreement, because terrorism is a value-laden term. Since it is associated with trying to create public fear, terrorism is designed to be subjective. Some people define virtually any abhorrent act of violence as ‘terrorism’, while others argue that the term should not be used at all. Neither of these is a rigorous or satisfying approach to a phenomenon that, unfortunately, kills innocent people in horrible ways. We may not agree that a particular event is terrorism, but in order to study it, we have to set out the fundamentals of what it is.

Faced with a need to define the phenomenon of terrorism, it is useful to focus on the five core elements found in virtually every definition of the term. They cover violence, political ends, actors, audience and victims.

#### **Box 29.1: Key terms**

##### **Understanding the five core elements in any definition of**

## **terrorism**

- 1 Violence or threat of violence
- 2 Actors
- 3 Political ends
- 4 the role of the audience
- 5 non-combatant or 'innocent' victims

First, there must be the threat or use of *violence*. People can engage in outrageous actions, but unless they actually involve violence or the threat of violence, they are not terrorism. Second, terrorism has a *political end*. Usually, it involves justice – at least someone's perception of it, whether human-made or divine. People who justify their use of terrorism always claim that they are being altruistic, meaning they are seeking a better fate for those on whose behalf attacks are carried out. If there is no broader political goal behind an act of violence, it is not terrorism. Third, though states engage in many kinds of dreadful violence that are also inherently political, non-state actors carry out terrorism. No moral judgement is intended in this statement. States also employ force for political ends and, as we have seen, state wars kill a lot more people and are in many ways much worse than terrorism. Some states even give support to terrorist groups, and that is an important area of study; but the groups are still non-state actors. People speak of 'terror from above' to refer to state use of force, and 'terrorism from below' to refer to terrorism by non-state actors, and that can be a useful way to think about it. There is an extended vocabulary to condemn bad state actions, including crimes against humanity, violations of the

laws of war, genocide and a range of other legal terms. That is not the case for terrorism. For this reason, the study of terrorism generally focuses on non-state actors.

The fourth key element is the *audience*. Terrorism uses random violence to maximise psychological shock and have an effect upon an audience, to intimidate, outrage or inspire. A key consideration in any terrorist attack is to look beyond the unfortunate victims and think about whom the action is intended to influence. Who is watching and reacting? It could be relatives of the victims, potential recruits, or a range of other audiences.

Finally, terrorism deliberately targets civilians or non-combatants, what the just war tradition calls ‘innocents’. It is violence intentionally directed against people who are generally considered to be defenceless, *illegitimate targets*. Terrorism always violates international norms.

So, at its core, terrorism has five characteristics: violence, a fundamentally political nature, non-state actor perpetrators, an audience and illegitimate targets. In sum, terrorism is the use or threat of use of symbolic violence by non-state actors against non-combatants for political ends.

But what are the grey areas in the definition? Some people think that attacks on property should be included in the definition of terrorism. If a terrorist group destroys a pipeline or bombs an unoccupied building, for example, is it terrorism? The exact character of the targets can be tricky – for example, are off-duty military members or police officers non-combatants? Political motives are not always simple to parse, especially when the perpetrator dies in the attack. Did they have a political purpose? Can mentally ill people be terrorists? The level of organisation is debated: If a person (sometimes called a ‘lone wolf’) carries out an attack because they are ‘inspired’ by a terrorist group – but has no actual connection to any organisation – is it terrorism?

**Box 29.2:** Discussion points

**Debating grey areas in the definition of terrorism: The 1983 US Marines Barracks bombing**

In 1983, US Marines went to Beirut to be part of a multinational peacekeeping force in the Lebanese civil war. In the early morning hours of 23 October, they were sleeping in their barracks when a suicide bomber, backed by the group Hezbollah, drove a truck laden with 2000 pounds of explosives into the building and detonated it. A total of 241 people, most of them US Marines, died in the explosion. Do you think this attack was terrorism?

**Box 29.3:** Discussion points

**Debating grey areas in the definition of terrorism: The 2016 Orlando Pulse Nightclub massacre**

Omar Mateen was a troubled US citizen of Afghan heritage who had a history of mental instability, criminal behavior and inflammatory remarks about al-Qaeda and Hezbollah. In 2013, he was placed on a terrorist watch list but removed after the FBI found no evidence of connection to a terrorist group. He regularly watched violent jihadist videos online. On 12 June 2016, heavily armed Mateen entered the Pulse nightclub in Orlando Florida, where he killed 49 people and wounded 53 more. While shooting, he called 911 and pledged allegiance to the so-called [Islamic State \(IS\)](#) of Iraq and Syria. After his pledge was publicised, IS claimed credit for the attack. Do you think this attack was terrorism?

## How to distinguish terrorism from related concepts

In addition to understanding what terrorism is, we must distinguish it from what it is *not*. Although the concepts overlap, terrorism is sometimes confused with [insurgency](#). But terrorist networks have only dozens or hundreds of members, attack civilians, do not hold territory and cannot directly confront military forces. Insurgencies are larger forces (often in the thousands or tens of thousands) that operate as military units, can seize and hold territory (at least temporarily) and are strong enough to target military forces. Sometimes insurgencies also target civilians as a tactic, but they are larger and stronger fighting forces than terrorist groups. If terrorist groups gain strength, they can morph into insurgencies or even trigger conventional wars: from the perspective of a state, those are bad outcomes. Insurgents engage state armed forces and assert themselves as alternatives to them (Cronin [2015](#)).

Criminal behaviour is also sometimes confused with terrorism, but there are crucial differences between the two. Unlike terrorists, criminals do not engage in altruistic violence that serves a broader political purpose. Their top priority is to acquire goods and profits that are ends in themselves. International terrorist movements and criminal networks overlap, so we cannot rely on lazy generalisations: terrorist groups engage in criminal behaviour to fund their activities, for example, and criminal groups sometimes channel resources to terrorist groups (particularly if they are well paid). But when a group shifts completely into criminal behaviour, it diverts its energies from a political goal that challenges the *status quo* towards material gain within the current order. This changes its ability and incentives to attract a popular following, and it also has implications for the type and degree of threat it poses to the state and to the

international system (Hoffman [2006](#): 35–6; Cronin [2009](#): 146–66). Groups that are profiting in the current political order usually do not want to up-end it.

## **What are the most useful concepts for understanding and analysing this topic?**

### **Typologies of terrorism**

Terrorist organisations operating around the world may be categorised by one of four major political motivations: they are left-wing terrorists, right-wing terrorists, ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorists, or religious or ‘sacred’ terrorists. Each motivation is intertwined with major ideologies, with left-wing terrorism associated with Marxism or communism, right-wing terrorism associated with fascism, ethno-nationalist/separatist terrorism associated with national or ethnic identity, and religious terrorism associated with spiritual beliefs. There are other, small categories, such as anti-vivisectionist terrorism that are not included as major types.

Today, religious or ‘sacred’ terrorism predominates, and fundamentalist Islamist (sometimes called ‘jihadist’) terrorism is the most globalised and dangerous form. It is especially associated with violent Sunni Islamist groups, as we will discuss below. But historically members of other religions also have engaged in terrorism, including extreme Jewish terrorists (e.g. Baruch Goldstein, who killed 29 and wounded 125 in the 1994 Cave of the Patriarchs massacre), extreme Christian terrorists (e.g. Timothy McVeigh, who killed 168 people in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing) and violent Sikh separatists (e.g. Babbar Khalsa, who carried out the 1984 assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, four months after the Golden Temple operation) (Juergensmeyer [2003](#)).

These four categories of terrorist groups are not always mutually exclusive. Sometimes a group has more than one driving force (e.g. Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group that is both religious and ethno-nationalist); usually, though, one ideology dominates. Thinking about them helps us see global trends and relationships between groups.

### **Waves of terrorism in modern history**

To appreciate our current circumstances, we must understand the broad history of modern terrorism. Today's terrorism by non-state actors traces its meaning directly to the French concept of 'propaganda of the deed' (*propaganda par le fait*), which was popularised by the French anarchist Paul Brouse in 1877. Propaganda of the deed was a weird extension of the notion that 'actions speak louder than words', although it was twisted to suggest that the horrific attacks that grab people's attention ('propaganda') speak loudest of all.

From the late nineteenth century, modern terrorist movements began a cyclical pattern of waxing and waning in what political scientist David Rapoport calls 'waves'. Each transnational wave of violence was associated with one of the types of terrorism we discussed above, and each lasted about a generation (or forty years), linking the ideas and activities of violent non-state groups throughout the world. Rapoport's waves spread around the world via new or changing modes of transportation, and methods of communication. But groups within a wave were not necessarily physically connected: today's 'inspired' attacks that happen in countries far away from an ideology's geographical source are nothing new.

Rapoport labels the first the Anarchist Wave; it began in the 1870s and ended in 1914. Anarchists had a lot of different ideas, but the driving force behind this wave was an effort to gain economic reform for ordinary workers

and overturn ageing autocracies. The wave includes a wide array of groups, including violent anarchists, Irish nationalists (the Fenians, Clan na Gael) and social revolutionaries such as the Russian group Narodnaya Volya (which assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881) (Clutterbuck [2004](#)). It was highly destabilising violence, and included terrorist attacks on every continent except Antarctica. No terrorist movement has killed as many state rulers in stable, established states, including the French President Marie Francois Sadi Carnot in 1894, Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Canovas del Castillo in 1897, the Empress Elisabeth of Austria in 1898, Italian King Umberto I of Italy in 1900, and US President William McKinley Jr in 1901 (Jensen [2014](#)). Most groups used bombings – especially dynamite (which was invented by Alfred Nobel in 1867), but also guns and knives. The first wave climaxed in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the outbreak of World War I.

The second wave was the anti-colonial or Nationalist Wave (1920s–1960s), beginning after World War I but gaining momentum after World War II. It was the strongest wave of the twentieth century, with the greatest global effects. The nationalist wave was driven by concepts of self-determination, leading to a spike in terrorist activity and the liquidation of European empires. The goal of most groups was to govern a piece of territory. More people were killed by second-wave terrorist attacks than in any other wave, and these groups tended to persist because they could count on the support of ethnic communities (Cronin [2009](#): 75–6). Groups in the second wave used bombings, but also small unit hit-and-run tactics with small arms (especially machine guns or assault rifles) in both urban and rural environments. Conflicts erupted in places such as Northern Ireland (the Provisional Irish Republican Army wanted independence from the United Kingdom), Cyprus (the EOKA wanted to unite Cyprus with Greece), Algeria (the FLN wanted Algeria's independence from France) and Palestine/Israel (Lehi and Irgun wanted the establishment of the independent

state of Israel). During this wave, terrorist violence often set off system-altering wars of national liberation, leading to the creation of new states.

The New Left/Marxist Wave came next (1960s–1980s), which Rapoport characterises mainly as a reaction to the Vietnam War. It includes leftist groups such as the West German Red Army Faction, the Italian Red Brigades, the American Weather Underground and the Japanese Red Army – all groups that were also deeply intertwined with the broader Cold War and the struggle between the communist and capitalist ideological models. Rapoport also puts the PLO in this wave. These groups mainly engaged in airline hijackings and kidnappings. State sponsorship of terrorism also peaked during this period, with terrorist groups supported, for example, by Iran (Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command), Libya (PLO, Abu Nidal Organisation) and North Korea (New People's Army, Japanese Red Army).

The last is the Religious Wave (1970s–2020s), incorporating Sunni Islamist groups like al-Qaeda, but also the Shi'ite Hezbollah, the Jewish extremist group Kahane Kai and Japan's Aum Shinrikyo, among others. This is a return to the ancient 'spiritualist' roots of terrorism, dating back at least to the first century CE, entwined in the political, economic and social context of twenty-first-century globalisation (Cronin [2002–03](#); see [Chapter 28](#)). Suicide attacks have emerged as the defining tactic of the fourth wave – not new, by any means, but unprecedentedly lethal, with high explosives and a deep dogma of martyrdom to facilitate them.

Developed shortly after the 9/11 attacks, this historical 'waves' framework has been scrutinised and tested by other scholars, and it has held up well (Rasler and Thompson [2009](#)). Some people debate the details, such as the exact years when each wave began or ended, or whether certain groups belong in one wave

or another. But it is the most useful framework for organising how we think about broad patterns of global terrorism over the past two centuries.

Looking to the future, the concept of waves of terrorism leaves us with two important questions to think about. First, when will the current wave of religious terrorism end? If it began in 1970s, as Rapoport argues, then it has already been underway for a generation. Shouldn't it be ending soon? Or will this wave prove to be longer or somehow different from the three that preceded it? Second, what kind of terrorism will come next? Some people think that religious terrorism could be replaced by a growing wave of right-wing terrorism. Or will it be something different? These possibilities are sobering, but they are important to contemplate.

### **Strategies of terrorism**

Throughout history, terrorist groups have used four basic strategies of terrorism, sometimes in combination and sometimes alone. To understand them, we must again remember the elements of any terrorist attack: the attacker, the target and the audience(s) that the terrorist group is trying to influence.

The first is *compellence*, which means the use of threats to influence another actor to stop doing something or to start doing something else. Compellence may try to force a state to withdraw from a territory, for example, by carrying out terrorist attacks that make holding ground so painful that a state abandons it. Well-known examples of terrorist strategies of compellence include the 1983 attack by Hezbollah on the US Marine Barracks in Beirut (see [Box 29.2](#)), after which the United States withdrew its forces, and the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu (in which al-Qaeda-linked fighters were involved), after which the United States withdrew its forces from Somalia. Compellence is a two-sided bargaining framework: basically, the group does this, and the state does that.

But looking at history, this two-sided framework omits much. Because it is symbolic violence, there are *three* sides to terrorism: the group, the target and the various audiences who are watching. What if the goal of an attack is to change the shape, size or attitude of an audience? Then the target is not a direct end in itself but an indirect means to affect something else. Strategies of leverage unfold differently from compellence, and when policy-makers or populations don't understand how they work, the group may use fear or anger to manipulate them.

The first strategy of leverage is *provocation*, which tries to force a state to react, to *do something* – not a specific policy, but an over-reaction that alienates the people it is supposed to protect. Provocation was the main purpose of terrorism during the nineteenth century. Groups like the Russian Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), for example, attacked representatives of the tsarist regime, hoping to provoke a brutal state response and inspire a peasant uprising. Other cases of provocation include the Basque group ETA's early strategy in Spain, the Sandinista National Liberation Front's strategy in Nicaragua, and the FLN's strategy in Algeria (Cronin [2008](#)). After a terrorist attack, policy-makers are understandably afraid to look weak, so they may over-react in ways that may upset their constituencies, invigorate the supporters of a terrorist group, draw in third parties (state or non-state) or spark a broader war – which is what happened with the killing of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914 at the outbreak of World War I.

The next strategy, *polarisation*, uses terrorist attacks to divide populations and delegitimise governments so they cannot govern. The goal is to set people against each other, fragmenting societies. For example, terrorist attacks may deliberately target one group of people (e.g. Shia Muslims) in order to get another group of people to retaliate (e.g. Sunni Muslims), and then the violence escalates: action and reaction. Polarisation is a common strategy against

democracies. Examples include the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland. In the United States, Timothy McVeigh's 1995 Oklahoma City terrorist attack on the Murrah Federal Building (168 killed and more than 600 injured) was meant to ignite a white separatist war against the federal government. Similarly, in 2015, 21-year-old Dylann Roof claimed he killed nine people attending Bible study in an historic African-American church in Charleston, South Carolina in order to start a race war (Mosendz [2015](#)). Polarisation seeks to anger or intimidate neutral civilian populations, forcing them to break into factions and turn against each other. The terrorist group hopes to come out on top of the violence, but sometimes the outcome is a failed state and escalation to a civil war.

The last strategy of leverage, *mobilisation*, tries to rally supporters to the cause. It was the strategy of the PLO in the 1972 Munich Olympics assault. In today's complex global media environment, this is becoming an increasingly common approach. Terrorist attacks are meant to attract recruits and raise the profile of the group internationally, drawing resources, sympathisers and allies. The symbolic nature of the attacks draws additional attention, sometimes even when the terrorist group is losing in other ways against a stronger state or group of states. This is why terrorist groups build elaborate media operations, including social media and other instantaneous platforms. Today's globalised, complex media landscape is well suited to a strategy of mobilisation (Cronin [2006](#)).

Understanding exactly what a group is trying to do is the only way to end terrorist violence. Sometimes terrorist groups use more than one approach, but there is no substitute for doing serious, in-depth homework about their goals, techniques and constituencies. Strategies of leverage try to undermine a state's legitimacy. Governments that fail to consider them sometimes take short-term actions that make sense from the two-sided standpoint of compellence, but play

into the hands of terrorist groups using indirect, three-sided strategies of provocation, polarisation or mobilisation instead.

## **What is at stake in this issue? Why and to whom does it matter?**

Understanding the history, patterns, types and strategies of terrorism is critical, because this type of heinous violence specifically tries to manipulate raw emotions. Its purpose is to play a weak hand against a much stronger state or international system, to gain a greater following or force *status quo* powers to undermine themselves in the service of the group's political purpose.

Still, it is important to remember that terrorist groups are inherently weak. Even when they use clever strategies, only a small fraction of terrorist groups succeed: in my research into nearly 500 groups, only roughly 6 per cent of them achieved the political ends they claimed to seek (Cronin [2009](#): 215–16). Most terrorist groups would prefer to engage in other, more effective forms of violence, including war and insurgency, so a key purpose of counter-terrorism should be to prevent terrorist groups from gaining power and transitioning into these other forms. States must be strong, but their strength comes not just from their crushing military responses; it is also located in shoring up their political legitimacy.

In fighting terrorism, the most important guideline is to prevent terrorist groups from using our fear of terrorist attacks as a weapon against us. There is always some threat of terrorism, but other things are likely to kill you first. The risk of dying in a car accident is much higher, for example – especially if you live in a developed country – yet few people are afraid of cars. As we know from the history of terrorism, small-scale terrorist attacks have always been with us.

And counter-terrorism extracts a cost: everything from the time spent getting through airport security to public money spent on counter-terrorism instead of something else. In the United States, for example, at least 263 US agencies have been created or reorganised since 9/11, with some 1272 government organisations and 1931 private companies, in about 10 000 locations, working on the area (Cronin [2013](#); Priest and Arkin [2010](#)). US spending on counter-terrorism since 9/11 has increased by at least \$75 billion per year, and this doesn't even include the cost in lives and treasure of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Mueller and Stewart [2014](#)). Fear can drive both the public and their elected and appointed officials. Most have a palpable dread of being held responsible if a serious terrorist attack occurs on their watch. But even with excellent counter-measures, such a thing could never be *completely* ruled out. What will we do the next day?

## Conclusion

Governments are accountable for protecting citizens from terrorist attacks, but that is not the only threat they face nor their only responsibility. It is worth considering opportunity costs – that is, what other priorities are being neglected in trying to eradicate the threat of terrorism. How will we crush the threat without inadvertently ceding the terrorist group greater power? Successful counter-terrorism has multiple dimensions to it, including not just military force but also law enforcement, diplomacy, counter-recruitment efforts and public resiliency. Indeed, the most effective counter-terrorism in the long-term is public education, especially learning to be balanced, objective and well informed, instead of driven by fear and anxiety.

## Discussion questions

**29.1** How do you define terrorism? Does your definition distinguish terrorism from other types of violence?

**29.2** What are the major types of terrorism?

**29.3** Do you think terrorism is ever justified?

**29.4** What are the four waves of modern terrorism?

**29.5** What types of strategies do terrorist groups use?

**29.6** Why are the media (both old and new forms) an integral part of terrorism?

**29.7** How can governments best respond?

**29.8** What are the trade-offs in deciding how much to spend on counter-terrorism?

### *Further reading*

Cronin, Audrey Kurth 2009, *How terrorism ends*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. *Examines the endings of groups and urges a strategic approach. The goal is to avoid costly missteps that unwittingly prolong terrorist campaigns.*

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Hoffman, Bruce 2006, *Inside Terrorism*, 2nd ed., Ithaca, NY: Columbia University Press. *An excellent overview of the phenomenon of terrorism in the modern era.*

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Rapoport, David 2004, 'The four waves of modern terrorism', in Audrey Kurth Cronin and James Ludes (eds), *Attacking terrorism: Elements of a grand strategy*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press. *Lays out the historical*

*framework of waves of terrorism in the modern era.*

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Richardson, Louise 2006, *What terrorists want: Understanding the terrorist threat*, New York: Random House. *An accessible introductory text examining the motivations of terrorists in many global settings.*

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Wright, Lawrence 2006, *The looming tower: Al-Qaeda and the road to 9/11*, New York: Knopf. *In an engaging narrative, this Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist lays out the story of al-Qaeda.*

# Post-conflict state-building



**Beth K. Greener**

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## Introduction

This chapter introduces students to the post-conflict state-building agenda. Identifying the end of the [Cold War](#), the rise of the discourse of [humanitarian intervention](#) and the events of 9/11, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as key

to the development of this agenda, the chapter focuses on the main areas of contention and debate in this field. In particular, it seeks to highlight debates over the political content of post-conflict state-building, and notes that more recent developments have slowed the impetus of this agenda. The chapter closes with a brief consideration of the impacts of the post-conflict state-building agenda, and asks where that agenda might head from here.

## **The rise of post-conflict state-building**

Statebuilding became the international community's default answer when presented with the need to respond to calls for help by severely weakened or beleaguered governments (as in the Solomon Islands), the dissolution of certain regimes (as in Afghanistan and Iraq) or the complete creation of new political authorities (as in Kosovo and East Timor). From 1999, such projects increasingly were seen as a potential panacea for solving conflict and cementing peace and security.

Although there were some historical precedents in the form of the post-World War II rebuilding of Japan and Germany, as noted in [Box 30.1](#), the motivation for external actors to be involved in the building of states in post-conflict sites has predominantly been a post-Cold War and post-9/11 affair.

### **Box 30.1: Case study**

#### **Post-war state-building in Japan**

Japan was occupied by the Allied powers from its defeat at the end of World War II until 1952. President Truman's 'US Initial Post Surrender Policy for Japan' set out two main objectives: (1) to prevent Japan from

being able to wage war again in the near future; and (2) to turn Japan into a pro-American Western-style democratic state.

Statebuilding efforts therefore focused on supporting the [institutionalisation](#) of [democracy](#) and [human rights](#). These were to be enshrined in the new Constitution of 1947, which also limited Japan's military capabilities and formally renounced the right to [war](#). In addition to this, the education and police services were decentralised, land reforms were undertaken and universal suffrage was introduced.

Economically, the powerful *zaibatsu* companies were dismantled, and government ministries such as the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) were empowered to help drive economic recovery after the devastations of war. US investment and aid also helped to stimulate growth. The perceived success of Japan's post-war recovery has at times been cited as a positive rationale for the continuing US involvement in post-conflict state-building.

Strategic competition prior to the 1990s meant that the notion of 'post-conflict state-building' – understood here as a broad-ranging set of activities, as opposed to more specific tasks such as propping up friendly regimes in various countries, [peacekeeping](#) or measures such as election organisation in Namibia in 1989 – was not part of our common terminology. The 1990s, however, saw the rise of 'humanitarian intervention' discourses. Driven by the demand to 'do something', and released from the competitive frame of the Cold War, the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) in particular sought to respond to international [peace](#) and [security](#) issues of the day by increasingly becoming involved in more comprehensive and often more interventionist peace operations. Efforts

undertaken in places such as Cambodia in 1994 began with limited mandates for specific peacekeeping missions, but slipped into more comprehensive responses as local needs grew. Even more ambitious projects were being undertaken by the end of the millennium, so that the United Nations, for example, was in effect responsible for the day-to-day administration of populations in Kosovo and East Timor (see [Box 30.2](#)).

### **Box 30.2: Case study**

#### **Post-conflict state-building in Kosovo**

NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR), originally comprising some 50 000 personnel, began operations on 12 June 1999. The UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was created to work alongside KFOR, which had been mandated to keep the peace in Kosovo by UN Security Council Resolution 1244 in June 1999, while UNMIK's task was to rebuild a lasting peace in Kosovo.

This meant that 'international officials took over key administrative functions, from taxation to garbage collection, in what amounted to the creation of a UN protectorate' (Paris [2004](#): 213). The transitional administration therefore assumed the authority and functions of the state, with these tasks being divided into four broad areas: police and justice; civil administration; democratisation and institution-building; and reconstruction and economic development (Dwan [2006](#): 268). Critics argued that 'no master plan existed against which implementation [of state-building policies] could be measured' (Heinemann-Gruder and Grebenschikov [2006](#): 44), and that the focus on administration and order as emphasised both in Kosovo and in East Timor encouraged a very technical view of the state that resulted in the people and institutions that

delivered these being seen as unresponsive to local views and inputs (Dwan [2006](#): 269).

On 17 February 2008, Kosovo declared independence, which was ruled not to breach international law by the International Court of Justice in mid-2010. Subsequent negotiations between Serbia and the European Union in 2013 brought about agreement to increase autonomy for the Serbian north in exchange for Serbia not seeking to block Kosovo's potential future membership of the European Union.

Moreover, humanitarian imperatives to help with building or rebuilding institutions in post-conflict situations have further been compounded by post-9/11 fears of the destructive potential of 'failed states'.

'Failed states' are said to be 'tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions', where there is an enduring violence aimed at the government, and where [state](#) authorities are unable to control borders or spiralling crime rates (Rotberg [2003](#): 5–6). After 9/11, security concerns have seen a great deal of interest in this notion that states may fail, as policy-makers have feared that failed states could potentially harbour [terrorist](#) bases or training camps (Mallaby [2002](#); Wainwright [2003](#)). This fear that a non-functioning state may allow, among other things, for terrorists and criminals to operate with impunity, combined with the interrelated advent of major state-building projects in Iraq and Afghanistan, has therefore meant that the term 'post-conflict state-building' has become part of our lexicon.

The importance of post-conflict state-building is due to a number of interrelated political and [normative](#) assumptions at play in contemporary international affairs. Central here are three assertions. The first is that the

[sovereign state](#) is currently the best form of political organisation available to help secure peace, justice and development. Second, state-building can and ought to be pursued with vigour by the international community (Fukuyama 2004; Ghani and Lockhart 2008; OECD 2008; Whaites 2008). Third, so-called ‘failed states’ constitute an active threat to the security of others that must be addressed (Mallaby 2002; Rotberg 2003) – with the US National Security Strategy of 2002 even explicitly asserting that ‘America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones’.



**Figure 30.1** US Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates boards a UH-60 Blackhawk on Camp Montith, Kosovo, 7 October 2008

Some of these points of view suggest that sovereign states currently constitute the dominant and ideal form of territorially based political and economic units for our world (and some argue that this situation *should* endure into the future, contrary to some [cosmopolitan](#) aspirations). Perhaps more importantly, when thinking about the actual shape of current efforts to build or rebuild states in post-conflict situations, it is clear that particular models of statehood are favoured over others in the current rush to build or rebuild states.

## The post-conflict state-building agenda

The concept of ‘post-conflict state-building’ has two major components, both of which lack definitional clarity. The idea of something being *post*-conflict is both optimistic (hopeful that conflict has passed) and pejorative (for while violent conflict has ceased, all is not yet well). Additionally, it can be difficult to ascertain when something is in fact post-conflict, if a situation remains somewhat unsettled if not in a state of outright violence (see Brown et al. [2008](#)). These definitional issues continue into a consideration of the idea of state-building.

As noted in [Chapter 11](#), modern states may be described in a variety of ways. Scholars therefore seek to understand how these entities called states may differ wildly, yet still retain some essential characteristics. Attempts to define the basic premises of the state tend to emphasise that these are predominantly legal entities based on fixed territorial boundaries that emerge out of some sort of political settlement, claim some sort of legitimacy domestically *and internationally* (this will be discussed more later in the chapter), and include a political executive and separate, permanent and professional administrative structures to implement policy.

Lakhdar Brahimi ([2007](#): 5) claims that state-building is ‘a description of exactly what it is that we should be trying to do in post conflict countries – *building effective systems and institutions of government*’ (italics added). Statebuilding writ large is often viewed as an ongoing dynamic process that involves the enhancement of the state’s ability to function. Alan Whaites ([2008](#): 6) therefore suggests that state-building involves three necessary areas of progress: political settlement; survival functions; and expected functions such as the provision of security. David Chandler ([2006](#): 1) further argues that state-

building refers to ‘constructing or reconstructing institutions of governance capable of providing citizens with physical and economic security’.

Post-conflict state-building is therefore a term that seems simply to denote particular kinds of technically oriented activities such as:

- the (re)writing of a constitution
- the (re)creation of the different offices of state
- the (re)creation of a criminal justice system
- the (re)creation of national police and/or military forces
- the (re)creation of a national taxation office, and so on.

These sorts of activities can be seen at work in a number of post-conflict situations in the world today (see [Box 30.3](#)), and are at times described by alternative but similar terms such as capacity-building, reconstruction, stabilisation and institution-building.

### **Box 30.3: Case study**

#### **Regional assistance to the Solomon Islands**

At the request of that country’s beleaguered Prime Minister, Allan Kemakeza, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) was deployed in mid-2003 to help restore law and order following years of civil strife. This law and order restoration phase has on the whole been hailed as a success (Glenn [2007](#)).

However, RAMSI was intended to do more than just provide for a security pause. The RAMSI mandate as agreed under the Solomon Islands Government-RAMSI Partnership Framework allowed for wide-ranging programs that aimed to:

- ensure the safety and security of the Solomon Islands
  - repair and reform the machinery of government, improve government accountability, and improve the delivery of services in urban and provincial areas
  - improve economic governance and strengthen the government's financial systems
  - help rebuild the economy and encourage sustainable broad-based growth
  - build strong and peaceful communities
- ([www.ramsi.org/about/what-is-ramsi.html](http://www.ramsi.org/about/what-is-ramsi.html)).

RAMSI therefore aimed to provide support and mentoring across a broad range of government initiatives, and this has meant activities such as promoting women in politics, restructuring financial and economic institutions and providing electoral support.

Critics such as Hameiri (2009) have, however, voiced their concerns about issues such as neo-colonialism and a lack of 'fit' of the types of institutions being promoted by RAMSI. Much of the mission wound down by 2013, although capacity-building institutions are ongoing and, controversially, it has been suggested that the Australian Federal Police may engage more permanently with the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (Prime Minister's Office 2016).

However, descriptions such as these that focus on 'function' or 'capacity' obscure the fact that the state-building process favoured in present-day circumstances is a political rather than merely technical process. Statebuilding

has not been a neutral phenomenon: it has promoted certain types of political, social and economic institutions and relationships to the exclusion of others.

## **The politics of post-conflict state-building**

Advocates of post-conflict state-building efforts often operate under the assumption that outsiders can, and indeed should, help with or even drive this process – a notion that parallels the theme of the democratisation literature of the 1990s, which argued in essence that [democracy](#) can and should be ‘manufactured’ (Di Palma [1990](#)). Thus, although the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD [2008](#)) suggested that state-building is an ‘endogenous’ process with which international actors can ‘align’, in practice there may be little in the way of shared local interest or capacity in post-conflict situations to drive the process from within. Even relationships purposively described as ‘partnerships’ between international and local actors have often been unbalanced in favour of the former. In practice, the term ‘post-conflict state-building’ therefore tends to refer to the role of external actors – predominantly members of the international community (including regional bodies, the [United Nations](#) or various coalitions of states) – who have the resources and motivations to shape other states.

Usually there is an accompanying assumption – either implicit or explicit – within much of these state-building activities as prescribed by those external actors that certain types of states are more desirable to build than others. [Critical](#) scholars therefore have argued that projects to rebuild the state mask ‘an implicit preference for a particular set of social and political relationships and the institutional arrangements supportive of this. Contemporary state-building

interventions ... are particularly shaped by a [neoliberal](#) institutionalist notion of state capacity' (Hameiri [2009](#): 57).

The particular model of statehood being promoted in post-conflict state-building efforts is one that seeks to embed certain Western or liberal democratic characteristics such as market economies, individual rights, political representation and the rule of law. These characteristics are touted by institutions, such as the United Nations in Kosovo and Timor, or NATO in Afghanistan, as the ideal type of political institution to help solve the various problems faced by post-conflict populations, with influential academic figures such as Francis Fukuyama also promoting these values.

Fukuyama ([2004](#)) sees the role of state-building as creating political and economic institutions that will be capable of democratic governance and economic development – in other words, modelled on neoliberal forms of politics and economics. Asraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart ([2008](#): 59) further argue that:

our world today is one of literal and symbolic connections between the public, the private, and the citizen and that value is derived from chains of relationships among these stakeholders ... a framework has been devised that balances the activities of the state, the market and the citizen. This recognises a public sphere of accountability and the rule of law; the market as a competitive space in which law allows freedom to contract, as well as the means of regulation; and a space for civil society where voluntary association is permissible. The citizen in this world is knowledgeable and may participate in all three spheres.

The concept of modern political, economic and social life outlined by Ghani and Lockhart, and necessarily involving state-building is, they argue, key to settled peace and prosperity. This particular state-building agenda is, however, under siege from a number of critics for a number of different reasons.

## Critics of the current agenda

Post-conflict state-building efforts have, first, been criticised for focusing too narrowly on ‘just’ establishing certain institutions and mechanisms such as constitutions, offices of state, police services or legal systems. In the case of the Solomon Islands, for example, critics have argued that closer attention needs to be paid to broader efforts *vis-à-vis* relationship-building between different sectors of government and society, and to the encouragement of civil society participation in general (Lambourne and Herro [2008](#): 286). Similar sentiments are expressed by Peter Schaefer ([2008](#): 101), who questions the focus on state-building rather than [nation](#)-building in Iraq and Afghanistan, while Stein Sundstol Eriksen ([2009](#)) argues that overly rigid state-building strategies used in the Democratic Republic of Congo have contributed to state weakness.

Sinclair Dinnen helps to clarify state-building projects as distinct from nation-building ones. Dinnen ([2007](#): 2) asserts that ‘state-building comprises the practical task of establishing or strengthening state institutions, while nation-building is more concerned with the character of relations between citizens and their state’, noting that:

The workings of many institutions of the modern state rely on the willingness of individuals to identify with – and be able to participate as members of – a common political community. This is essential if states are to be held accountable effectively by the citizens they exist to serve. The construction and reproduction of national identity remains a live, continuous and, often, contested issue in most nation-states.

Other critics have focused on the impacts of state-building in post-conflict situations by asking how the focus on states may impede the [peacebuilding](#) process (Call with Wyeth [2008](#)). After all, these are sometimes only recently or tenuously post-conflict situations where the building of an effective state will be

at least partly dependent on a sustainable peace. Certain aspects of post-conflict efforts that contribute to this broader peacebuilding effort are not in state form, as mechanisms to help polities resolve rival claims may or may not be state-based, and an exclusive focus on state-building therefore may have negative effects (Cousens [2001](#): 12).

Other critics have focused on the political nature of these state-building efforts. The drive towards democratic polities as part of these efforts, for one, has met with a variety of critiques. The difficulties faced by historical and recent democracy promotion programs in countries in Melanesia, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa have, for example, demonstrated a number of problems with the dogged pursuit of democratisation along Western models (Zakaria [2003](#)). Here, as Benjamin Reilly ([2006](#): 812) notes, any cultural or social features existing in tension with the adoption of such practices are particularly complicated by a post-conflict situation where ‘pressures for politicization of identity issues’ can result in those oppositional politics occurring along (potentially violence-inducing) ethnic or other lines.

Another assumption in much of the theory that drives contemporary state-building practice is that [capitalist](#) market economies with liberalised trading practices are desirable counterparts to the state. The liberalisation of trade, the promotion of foreign direct investment and export-driven economies, the downsizing of the public sector in favour of private competition, and so on, have become the dominant model for promoting successful economic development. Yet the work of Roland Paris ([2004](#)) outlines how political stability and economic prosperity have proved difficult to achieve in post-conflict sites despite countries undergoing a process of democratisation, adopting market economies and following advice from international organisations. Moreover, creating and maintaining the apparatus of a state is an expensive business. Many countries struggle to field the human and financial capital required to undertake

diplomatic relationships, run police and defence forces or provide key health and education services.

Lastly, as Necla Tschirgi ([2004](#): ii) points out in relation to the likely result of such state-building efforts in post-conflict sites, the post-9/11 necessity of preventing state failure in order to enhance one's own security is a formulation 'driven by external demands', and is therefore 'likely to undermine the basic premise of peacebuilding that peace, security and stability cannot be imposed from the outside'. The agendas of international actors in places such as Afghanistan (Suhrke [2007](#)) and the Solomon Islands (Hameiri [2009](#)) have therefore been called into question, with critics questioning who post-conflict state-building processes serve in these places, and why. This brings us back to one of the central assumptions at play: that outsiders can and should promote or even control state-building efforts in post-conflict situations.

Criticisms about post-conflict state-building therefore often focus on the motivations behind particular state-building agendas, most notably the concern that these agendas might not serve the local populations but rather reflect post-9/11 security measures implemented to make interveners feel more secure. These concerns are also related to others about the relationship between state-building, peacebuilding and nation-building, and hence to the suitability of the models of state-building that are promoted in post-conflict situations, with concerns expressed over the extent of the social engineering that is taking place (Zaum [2007](#)).

## **Impacts of post-conflict state-building**

A number of consequences have emerged from the recent post-conflict state-building agenda. Some positive impacts could arguably be seen in the restoration

of law and order, for example, in the Solomon Islands (Glenn [2007](#)), or in the tentatively successful trial of liberalised economic models in the Rwandan coffee trade (Boudreaux and Ahluwalia [2009](#)), but the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the difficulties met in applying state-building models to highly complex and hostile environments.

#### **Box 30.4:** Case study

##### **Post-conflict state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan**

A US-led Coalition of the Willing toppled the Taliban government from power in Afghanistan in November 2001. Charged with providing hospitality and protection to al-Qaida, the group that had undertaken the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the Taliban continued to be targeted by a US military operation called Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), while NATO led an International Stabilisation Assistance Force (ISAF) with the aim of helping to build a strong state.

Originally the plan was for a 'light footprint' to focus on Kabul and to attempt to avoid a feeling of occupation (and arguably to save expenses). However, an ongoing challenge from the Taliban, combined with limited resources and capacity within the country, saw NATO extend its mandate outside of Kabul in 2003. Efforts were made to create a cohesive Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), and other centralised state institutions, while more localised security and development projects occurred through Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).

Insurgent activity continued as the new government in Kabul, led by exile Hamid Karzai, struggled to gain legitimacy and the United States had to 'surge' troops back in in 2006. Towards the end of 2013, a

number of countries were withdrawing and projects were being wound down; however, despite more than a decade of security and development efforts, Afghanistan's economic, political and security situation remains precarious. In mid-2016, civilian wartime deaths were rising and government forces controlled only 65 per cent of territory (Sidahmed and Ackerman [2016](#)) with the Taliban once more gaining ground.

In 2003, the United States and its allies had also invaded Iraq. Ostensibly to prevent weapons of mass destruction from becoming available to al-Qaeda, the United States claimed that this was an act of pre-emptive self-defence and that Saddam Hussein's failure to comply with the terms of his 1991 ceasefire with the United Nations meant hostilities were ongoing.

The military incursion was swiftly successful, and Saddam Hussein was captured and put to death. But this initial success was not followed up by similarly impressive state-building efforts. Post-war planning was left wanting and stability was scarce. Insurgent armed groups composed largely of Sunni men emerged in opposition to the occupying forces and to the repressive Shia-dominated Iraqi government.

This situation resulted in the rise of Islamic State (ISIS, now known more commonly as [IS](#)), an effective fighting force deemed an 'existential threat' by some commentators in the West for its expanding influence, brutal methods and determination to create an Islamic caliphate. The promise of a stable, democratic, human-rights-protecting, moderate Iraqi state has not eventuated.

Concerns had been raised early on in Iraq and Afghanistan about a potential disconnect between the interests of the local populations and those of the intervening ‘state-builders’. There were also fears that state-building efforts might exacerbate underlying internal conflicts. For Iraq and Syria in particular, this fear has been realised in the rise of serious sectarian conflict and the emergence of an alternative form of state-building to that proposed and pursued by the United Nations and Western governments.

IS possesses and pursues many of the trappings of statehood. In 2015, it had some 30 000 fighters, held territory in Iraq and Syria, maintained extensive military capabilities, controlled lines of communication, commanded infrastructure (including oil fields), funded itself and engaged in sophisticated military operations – leading Audrey Cronin ([2015](#)) to claim that ‘if ISIS is purely and simply anything, it is a pseudo-state led by a conventional army’.

Obviously this is not the type of state-building that the United States and its allies envisaged for the region. The rise of the human rights discourse and the status given to the democratic peace thesis argument in the 1990s, combined with the coining of the ideas of ‘state failure’ (or ‘state fragility’) that came to fruition after 9/11, had already meant that some states were deemed more legitimate than others. Western developed states constitute the preferred model, an ideal to be replicated in post-conflict situations with efforts to graft liberal values and democratic principles into Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet at the same time it is increasingly being recognised that the characteristics of these states have not held much relevance to the rest of the world (Boas and Jennings [2005](#)).

These efforts are, moreover, highly expensive. Recent studies suggest that these war-fighting and state-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan will have cost the US government US\$814 billion and US\$685 billion in direct costs respectively (Belasco [2014](#)) with indirect cost estimates (such as ongoing medical care for veterans and so on) between US\$4–6 trillion (Bilmes [2013](#)).

Given the combined effects of these issues – that is, the impact of low prospects of success for high costs and the questionable legitimacy of resultant institutions as set against the potential cost of inaction – what then is the likely future of post-conflict state-building?

## **The future of post-conflict state-building**

The argument that ‘learning to do state-building better is central to the future of world order’ (Fukuyama [2004](#): 120) has been hampered by the practical problems met in Iraq and Afghanistan as outlined above, and by the far-reaching impacts of the GFC, amongst other recent developments. Enthusiasm for the liberal state-building project has waned; however, a key question to be asked of the state-building agenda is: If we are not building states, then what other options exist?

Do post-conflict areas necessarily need to be replaced by states, or might there be other forms of political organisation that would work better? There are four potential alternatives: global governance; the ‘new regionalism’; neo-medievalism; and shared sovereignty. This chapter will explore the latter two options.

‘Neo-medieval’ governance occurs when individuals exercise their political and economic participation in many different types of political organisation, such as city councils, provincial bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (see Bull [1977](#): 264–76). Shared sovereignty refers to the idea that states would ‘share’ their sovereignty with other institutions or countries. This model has not gained much ground, perhaps in part because of the cost as well as valid concerns about neo-colonialism. Some have advocated for ‘neo-trusteeship’ or ‘shared sovereignty’ in situations where the capacity to undertake

state roles and responsibilities is lacking (see Fearon and Laitin [2004](#); Krasner [2004](#)).

In light of such options, some scholars have questioned the apparent necessity to build or rebuild states in a more systematic way by asking: ‘What might constitute a viable political community?’ (Boege et al. [2009](#): 602). Volker Boege and colleagues identify a number of areas where the logic of the formal state exists alongside and in relationship with both a traditional ‘informal’ societal order and the effects of globalisation and associated social fragmentation. Here ‘in short, these hybrid political orders differ considerably from the Western model state’, and these authors ‘seek a broader understanding of, and advocate, a greater appreciation of hybridity, beyond the limits of its negative connotations’ (Boege et al. [2009](#): 606).

These authors draw on the work of Wiuff Moe ([2009](#)) and Hagmann and Hoehne ([2007](#)) in arguing that Somaliland is an example of an emerging state grounded in a hybrid political order: a ‘state’ that enjoys a great deal of local legitimacy but is not yet recognised internationally; that does not claim full monopoly over the use of force, with security being dealt with in a decentralised manner; and that exists in a situation where customary, Islamic and statutory norms and practices offer up alternative forms of justice. Other work has also begun to pick up on this notion of hybridity.

In the South Pacific, scholars have recently demonstrated the usefulness of hybridity in situations where formalised state systems play governance roles alongside local chiefs, the church and civil society. In the Solomon Islands, for example, justice is meted out by a combination of these actors, with the formal state representatives – the police – only engaging in certain situations such as when invited to or when serious crimes have occurred (Allen et al. [2013](#); Dinnen and Allen [2016](#)). Similar investigations with regard to shared power structures in Bougainville paint pictures of dispersed authority (Boege [2014](#)). Legitimate

political power for the purposes of donors or international institutions is thus represented in the form of the state while legitimate political power for the purposes of the local community is to be found in the engagement of these other sites of authority (custom, church, civil society).

An interrelated – albeit more top-down – approach has been to temper, though perhaps not so substantially challenge, the current agenda, by allowing for more local contextualisation in state-building efforts. The OECD has worked up a number of principles to this effect (see [Box 30.5](#)).

**Box 30.5:** Discussion points

**OECD Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States**

- Take context as the starting point.
- Ensure all activities do no harm.
- Focus on state-building as the central objective.
- Prioritise prevention.
- Recognise the links between, political, security and development objectives.
- Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies.
- Align with local priorities in different ways in different contexts.
- Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors.

- Act fast ... but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance.
- Avoid pockets of exclusion ('aid orphans'). (OECD [2007](#))

The Principles were field-tested in nine countries over 2006–07:

- the Solomon Islands (facilitated by Australia and New Zealand)
- the Democratic Republic of Congo (facilitated by Belgium)
- Haiti (facilitated by Canada)
- Sudan (facilitated by Norway)
- Guinea Bissau (facilitated by Portugal)
- Nepal (facilitated by the United Kingdom)
- Somalia (facilitated by the [World Bank](#) and the United Kingdom)
- Yemen (facilitated by UNDP and the United Kingdom).

It is important to note, however, that the OECD's emphasis in policy documents on state-building in times of fragility (OECD [2008](#)) has moved to emphasise that it seeks to engage in supporting state-building in situations of conflict and fragility (OECD [2011](#)). The 'centre of gravity', to use military terminology, therefore appears to have shifted to emphasise local ownership in more than just name – though this also serves the purpose of cost-cutting and diminishing levels of responsibility by external players or would-be state-builders in the face of less than impressive state-building results thus far.

## **Women, peace and security in the Pacific Islands**

**Nicole George**

UN Security Council resolution 1325 (commonly referred to as UNSCR1325) was adopted in October 2000. It draws attention to the gendered impacts of conflict-related violence and advocates for the full participation of women at all stages of peace processes. This original resolution has been complemented, in the intervening period, by eight further follow-up resolutions that together make up the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. More than 60 governments around the globe have committed to the implementation of WPS provisions through the establishment of National Action Plans. Intergovernmental organisations such as the African Union and the European Union have also adopted Regional Action Plans.

In November 2012, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the region's premier intergovernmental institution, developed its own Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. This was the culmination of a long and hard-fought campaign by civil society activists from a number of the region's conflict-affected countries (notably Fiji, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands), who worked collaboratively to build support for greater recognition of gender in future regional conflict management processes.

But regional articulations of the WPS policy framework in this part of the world are not simply a 'cut and paste' version of the relevant resolutions that have been adopted in New York. Like all efforts to institutionalise emerging global policy norms, the WPS agenda is always subjected to interesting processes of renegotiation (George and Shepherd [2016](#)). This is particularly so in the Pacific Islands. Here, those

advancing claims for greater recognition of women's rights often need to contend with opposing claims made by cultural, and religious leaders who argue that 'local' value systems and beliefs need protection from these allegedly 'alien' or 'foreign' influences. To appreciate the particular shape of the WPS agenda as it has been articulated in this context, and the extent to which it has enabling and potentially constraining potential for Pacific Island women, it is therefore helpful to consider how it fits within the broader 'architecture of entitlement' that shapes debate on gender and security in the Pacific Islands region generally (George [2016a](#)).

Like the domain of institutional politics, conflict in the region is commonly understood to be 'men's business'. Women have played important roles in conflict, both in the leadership of resistance movements – sometimes as combatants – and as conflict mediators and peacebuilders. But these associations frequently have been overlooked by local leaders, as well as outside observers, who tend to assume that the protagonists of conflict are predominantly male and that the management of conflict therefore needs to address masculine priorities. This has meant that efforts to build the future security of places that have experienced violence and instability in the past have predominantly been focused on highly masculinised understandings of the tensions that fuel conflict and the kinds of political, economic and socio-cultural settlement processes that might be undertaken to re-establish peace. Gender advocates in the countries that have experienced conflict, particularly those of the western Pacific, have worked hard to challenge this scenario. They have highlighted the gendered costs of conflict, the particular burdens that have been shouldered by women when tensions

escalate and the efforts women make to mediate these tensions as they work to rebuild relations in their communities in the wake of violence. This advocacy gained traction as fears began to mount among some of the region's observers that internal tensions within Pacific Island countries were spreading and making the region as a whole vulnerable to instability. A new focus in regional security policy became evident in the late 1990s; it saw the PIF adopt an interventionist policy framework for conflict management in 2000 known as the Biketawa Declaration (Firth [2001](#)). This change to the regional regulatory architecture overturned long-standing norms of non-interference that had shaped how the PIF articulated its capacity to respond to matters considered 'internal' to its member states. In the case of internal instances of conflict, the Biketawa Declaration authorised a raft of 'crisis management' measures ranging from the establishment of fact-finding committees to the deployment of security missions to maintain stability.

With new attention focused on the development of regional mechanisms for crisis management, women activists keen to promote the regional uptake of WPS policy were particularly effective in leveraging support among the region's security policy-makers. Their contention was that they – for too long the unsung heroes of conflict mediation and peacebuilding – also had contributions to make to the development of regional stability. To lend weight to their claims, they pointed to the cultural protocols that give special status to the peacemaking roles of women as mothers and sisters, legitimising their dispute-settlement capacities in family, tribe or community contexts. Sometimes religious teachings add further authority to women's peacebuilding work. In Bougainville, for example, the Catholic figure of Mother Mary, or 'Mama Maria', the patron saint of the island, is said to reside within all

women and, during the years of the conflict, was believed to add God's blessing and power to women's conflict mediation efforts (Hermkens [2011](#)).

Regional advocacy of the UN Security Council's WPS resolutions occurred against this backdrop. It was greatly assisted by the post-2000 shift in regulatory architecture that emphasised the development of regional mechanisms of crisis management. Locally, it was aided by the presence of informal customary and religious regulatory structures that upheld women's particular capacities for peacebuilding.

The arguments were persuasive. When then PIF Secretary-General, Neroni Slade, launched the PIF Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in November 2012, he underscored the peacebuilding theme, describing the plan as 'utilizing and enhancing the inherent capabilities of women as peacebuilders, including at state institution levels, to provide a secure and conflict free environment for our communities' (PIFS [2012](#)).

This formulation of WPS policy as one that institutionalises recognition and supports women's peacebuilding capacities was significant. But it has not been without cost. Describing peacebuilding as an activity that is 'inherent' to women may also mean that women's conflict-mediation capabilities are written into security policy architecture in ways that do not recognise this as political acumen, but rather view it as a natural and innate gendered instinct. This may make it more difficult for women to have their peacebuilding expertise recognised as political skill. The experiences of women in post-conflict Bougainville offer a poignant lesson on this point. The claim that 'women brought peace to Bougainville' is a continuing refrain that features in conversation on the gendered experience of conflict in this territory. Yet these proud

recollections are also peppered with complaints too. The most common one heard from women is that they have been unable to capitalise on the peacebuilding agency they exhibited in the conflict period. Their contention here is that they have struggled to make a mark on the political life of their country in the longer term, and have few opportunities to concretely contribute to the ongoing, but more masculinised, project of post-conflict transition (George [2016b](#)). Women in Bougainville may be viewed as ‘mothers of the peace’, but the formal realm of institutional decision-making continues, to a large extent, to be the business of men.

The PIF establishment of a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, is significant, both in global and regional terms, and is a policy gain that is testament to the determination of the region’s women activists. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the ways in which this policy has been interpreted regionally. The extent to which the PIF’s Regional Action Plan disrupts the gendered architecture of entitlement that gives shape to security policy in the region may be more in doubt. The plan may certainly authorise women to enter security debate predominantly as highly feminised peacebuilders. As I have shown, this can provide women with well-deserved recognition for their community work. But it may also constrain where and how women are able to meaningfully participate in the longer term business of post-conflict governance.

## Conclusion

Statebuilding had been pursued with great vigour, as it was seen as the only viable option for helping to solve post-conflict development and security needs. Such efforts, however, were and are highly political acts in their promotion of particular models of states. Statebuilding efforts have therefore met with a number of critiques along the way. The difficulties still being met in attempting to build unitary, democratic and secure states in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan have curbed enthusiasm for the expensive and involved efforts that make up post-conflict state-building in the contemporary world, and alternative approaches are gaining ground. Moreover, the relevance and sustainability of the politically and economically liberalised and centralised state institutions required by recent state-building attempts have been questioned by a number of critics, and alternative suggestions have spoken of the possibilities of ‘hybrid political orders’. The future of state-building in post-conflict situations is likely to involve a reconceptualisation of the role of the state and statehood in the international arena, as these models provide alternatives to those that have proven to be expensive, unwieldy and not particularly successful.

## **Discussion questions**

**30.1** Consider Tilly’s ([1975](#): 42) suggestion that ‘War made the state, and the state made war.’ What might this assertion mean for contemporary post-conflict state-building efforts?

**30.2** What is the relationship between state-building and peacebuilding? Which of these should be prioritised in addressing the problems of post-conflict situations, and why?

**30.3** Find a ‘Failed States Index’ on the internet. How useful is this type of classifying exercise? What are the consequences that emerge from the creation

of such an index?

**30.4** What are the various obstacles in international relations that would make it difficult to move away from the post-conflict state-building agenda as currently construed? What is the likely future of post-conflict state-building?

**30.5** What does the case of Iraq say about the problems and prospects for post-conflict state-building?

### *Further reading*

Boege, Volker, Brown, Anne, Clements, Kevin and Nolan, Anna 2009, 'Building peace and political community in hybrid political orders', *International Peacekeeping*, **16**(5), 599–615. *Advances the notion of political hybridity instead of fragile states in the context of state-building.*

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Call, Charles with V. Wyeth 2008, *Building states to build peace*, Boulder CO: International Peace Institute and Lynne Rienner. *Emphasises the importance of building capacity as well as legitimacy in state-building.*

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Chandler, David 2006, *Empire in denial: The politics of state-building*, London: Pluto Press. *Argues that Western state-building is a form of empire aimed at producing states in a country's own image.*

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Fukuyama, Francis 2004, *Statebuilding: Governance and world order in the 21st century*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press. *A liberal case for intervention and state-building based on good governance.*

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Ghani, Ashraf and Lockhart, Clare 2008, *Fixing failed states: A framework for rebuilding a fractured world*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *A wide-ranging discussion by experienced practitioners of the challenges facing international*

*organisations.*

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OECD (2011). *Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility*. Paris: OECD. *The official document from the OECD on its approach to state-building.*

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Paris, Roland 2004, *At war's end: Building peace after civil conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Emphasises the need for longer-term engagement to establish stable political institutions.*

# Humanitarianism and armed intervention



**Thomas G. Weiss**

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## Introduction

This chapter introduces students to an idea that has enjoyed a remarkable, if hotly contested, development in the post-[Cold War](#) era: [humanitarian intervention](#). Based on a commitment to principles of humanity, such

intervention seeks to alleviate the unnecessary human suffering caused by violent conflict by intervening in another state with force under certain limited conditions. The chapter first outlines the origins of [humanitarianism](#); it then sketches a short history of humanitarian intervention before discussing the shift from humanitarian intervention to [responsibility to protect \(R2P\)](#). As the context of world politics becomes ever more complex, debate about global responsibilities to protect suffering strangers will continue to shape the theory and practice of international relations.

For the last quarter-century, humanitarian organisations have careened from one major disaster to another. The end of the Cold War unleashed a pent-up demand for acute humanitarian action – that is, protecting and assisting individuals caught in war zones. Analyses of this period typically highlight three defining trends that explain this expansion, as well as second thoughts about the overall direction (Barnett and Weiss [2011](#)). The first is the growing willingness and ability of outsiders to help those at risk. Radical improvements in information technology and logistical capacities, growing international support for coming to the rescue of victims, multiplying numbers of relief organisations and substantial increases in available resources promised an enhanced collective capacity to provide relief, rescue and reconstruction. The second trend reflects the mounting dangers that aid workers confront in war zones where access is difficult, where they are often perceived as a threat or as a resource to be captured, where their own physical safety is in doubt and where civilian populations are the intended victims (Duffield [2001](#); Kaldor [1999](#)). In addition, the deployment of military force in such arenas for human protection purposes has raised new kinds of questions about the ability of aid workers to remain faithful to their principles (Hoffman and Weiss [2017](#); Weiss [2013a](#)).

This chapter focuses on the peculiar dynamics of what until recently was called ‘humanitarian intervention’ (forcefully coming to the rescue of civilians

without the consent of political authorities in the territories where victims are located), but is now more commonly called ‘R2P’: the emerging norm of the responsibility to protect. First, however, it provides a basic introduction to humanitarianism, as well as to the early history of humanitarian intervention, before reviewing the contemporary phenomenon.

## **The origins of humanitarianism**

Charity and expressions of care and concern are certainly not a modern phenomenon. Kith and kin have long sought to extend helping hands, which is symbolised by the Biblical tale of the Good Samaritan. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe, however, the Industrial Revolution produced ugly social conditions and new instabilities that led to the modern form of humanitarianism. Changes in the economy, society and culture led to the founding of religious and social movements, of which the anti-slavery movement was the most famous. Importantly, many of the same reform societies, social movements and leaders who spearheaded campaigns to humanise domestic society also became deeply troubled by unnecessary suffering outside their borders (Calhoun [2008](#)). If the suffering of neighbours was unacceptable when something could be done to alleviate it, why should artificially drawn frontiers define the limits of concern?

The official beginning of war-related international humanitarianism is usually dated to the aftermath of a bloody battle in northern Italy in 1859. The Swiss businessman Henry Dunant was appalled by what he saw at the Battle of Solferino and the needless suffering during the last engagement of the second war of Italian independence between Austro-Hungarian and Franco-Piedmontese troops (see [Box 31.1](#)). Dunant pulled together friends and acquaintances from

Geneva, and also persuaded the Swiss Government to convene a diplomatic conference, which resulted in the official establishment in 1864 of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This gathering also led to the signing of the first Geneva Convention, the foundation for what would eventually be codified as [international humanitarian law](#), which is also called ‘the laws of [war](#)’ (Bugnion [2003](#)).

**Box 31.1:** Key texts

**Extracts from Henry Dunant’s *Memory of Solferino* ([1986](#) [\[1862\]](#))**

I was a mere tourist with no part whatever in this great conflict; but it was my rare privilege, through an unusual train of circumstances, to witness the moving scenes that I have resolved to describe.

([1986](#): 4)

Here is hand-to-hand struggle in all its horror and frightfulness; Austrians and Allies trampling each other under foot, killing one another on piles of bleeding corpses, felling their enemies with their rifle butts, crushing skulls, ripping bellies open with sabre and bayonet. No quarter is given; it is sheer butchery; a struggle between savage beasts, maddened with blood and fury ... A little further on, it is the same picture, only made the more ghastly by the approach of a squadron of cavalry, which gallops by, crushing dead and dying beneath its horses’ hoofs.

(1986: 5)

But why have I told all these scenes of pain and distress, and perhaps aroused painful emotions in my readers? Why have I lingered with seeming complacency over lamentable pictures, tracing their details with what might appear desperate fidelity?

It is a natural question. Perhaps I might answer it by another.

Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers?

(1986: 27)

Humanity and civilization call imperiously for such an organization as is here suggested.

(1986: 29)

From those conventions and their updates in 1949 and 1977, along with efforts in what are called The Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907, humanitarian action customarily has followed the ICRC's core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (see [Box 31.2](#)). The industry grew, particularly during and after World Wars I and II; both [non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#) and intergovernmental ones – now principally of the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) system – dominate the provision of assistance to war

victims. Although aid organisations have come to disagree about when the operating principles of independence and neutrality lead to desired outcomes (as we see below), the principles of impartiality and humanity are defining features of their identities.

### **Box 31.2: Key texts**

#### **The ICRC's Mission Statement**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

Source: <https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are/mandate>

Humanitarian action is intimately related to **cosmopolitanism** – the claim that each person is of equal moral worth and a subject of moral concern, and that everyone at risk, regardless of their background or affiliation, and regardless of their religion or ethnic background, deserves equal attention. Humanitarian

organisations are expressing a cosmopolitan ethic as they relieve suffering and save lives, and thus they fundamentally distinguish themselves from other entities with resources to devote to ‘saving strangers’ in an international society of states (Wheeler [2000](#)).

It would be useful to have a sense of the magnitude of the contemporary ‘humanitarian enterprise’ (Minear [2002](#)). Many accounts proceed as if humanitarianism began with the end of the Cold War, clearly ignoring history. While the absence of longitudinal data on basic categories such as expenditure, income, number of organisations and activities makes certain comparisons difficult, nonetheless the humanitarian sector has undergone significant growth since the end of the Cold War – most noticeably in its density, resources and activities.

For a start, the sheer increase in organisational numbers is striking. Notwithstanding debate about whether a particular entity is or is not humanitarian, there are currently at least 2500 NGOs in the humanitarian business, but only about 10 per cent of them are serious players – based on a 2003 roster (no longer updated) by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In fact, already by 2001 the half-dozen or so largest NGOs controlled between US\$2.5 billion and US\$3 billion, or about half of all global humanitarian assistance (Development Initiatives [2003](#): 56), a figure that had doubled by 2015.

A detailed survey of US-based private voluntary agencies engaged in relief and development suggests a picture of growth more generally over the last three-quarters of a century. In 1940, shortly after the start of World War II, the number rose quickly to 387 organisations (from 240), but the numbers dropped to 103 in 1946 and 60 in 1948. They rose steadily thereafter and reached 543 in 2005. The growth was especially dramatic from 1986 to 1994, when the number increased from 178 to 506 (McCleary [2009](#): 3–35).

UN organisations are also prominent in the sector. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) were born as humanitarian agencies and now are the mainstays of the intergovernmental humanitarian system. Other international organisations were created to foster development but are increasingly involved in relief and reconstruction because of humanitarian demand and the availability of resources, including the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the [World Bank](#).



**Figure 31.1** UN chopper

There has also been a growth in the number of international and regional organisations whose primary responsibility is to coordinate humanitarian assistance, including the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and OCHA (preceded by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, DHA). The same phenomenon exists for NGOs in the United States and Europe, including InterAction in Washington, DC, the International Council for Voluntary Action

(ICVA) and Emergency Committee for Humanitarian Response (ECHR) in Geneva, and Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE) in Brussels. In addition, states, not-for-profit disaster firms, other businesses and various foundations are increasingly prominent contributors to humanitarian action.

Private contributions have increased, but most impressive has been the growth in official (i.e. governmental) assistance. The end of the Cold War resulted in no transformation of international institutions, but rather a huge sigh of relief. It unleashed armed conflicts and the eruption of crises held in check by East–West tensions; and it also resulted in the proliferation of humanitarian agencies and opening resource floodgates. The budgets of humanitarian organisations registered a five-fold increase from about \$800 million in 1989 to some \$4.4 billion in 1999, with an additional quadrupling to \$16.7 billion in 2009. After peaking at just over \$20 billion in 2010, the figures drifted downward to \$19.4 billion in 2011 and \$17.9 billion in 2012 but then increased dramatically to \$22 billion in 2013 and \$25 billion in 2015 (Global Humanitarian Assistance [2014](#)). While the number of UN organisations has not grown, their budgets have (accounting for about two-thirds of total OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) humanitarian disbursements). As many as 37 000 international NGOs are relevant for what Linda Polman ([2010](#)) calls 'the crisis caravan', even if only a handful of the 2500 mainly humanitarian ones are truly significant.

## **A short history of humanitarian intervention**

The European scramble for colonies in the nineteenth century gave birth to the term 'humanitarian intervention' (Bass [2008](#)). Many colonial powers

rationalised the use of overwhelming force with the use of humanitarian rhetoric. But they selectively applied such might to geographical areas with immediate strategic and economic interests, and often stayed long after the territory was more politically stable. It is no wonder, then, that the former subjugated peoples who are living in now independent countries that constitute the global South harbour tremendous doubts and frequently express outright hostility toward the claim from the West (which is where the former [colonial](#) masters mainly are located) that military interventions for human protection purposes are self-sacrificing and disinterested.

The first international legal references to humanitarian intervention appeared after 1840 (Stapleton [1866](#); Stowell [1921](#)). Two interventions in particular were directly responsible for stimulating such analytical interest: the intervention in Greece by Britain, France and Russia in 1827 to stop Turkish massacres and suppression of populations associated with it; and the intervention by France in Syria in 1860 to protect Maronite Christians. In fact, there were at least five prominent interventions undertaken by European powers against the Ottoman Empire from 1827 to 1908 (Danish Institute of International Affairs [1999](#): 79). By the 1920s, the rationale for intervention had broadened to include the protection of nationals abroad as well, when they were under attack from colonial peoples or local authorities (Brownlie [1963](#): 338–9).

Intervention thus was invoked against a state's abuse of its sovereignty for brutal and cruel treatment of those within its power – both nationals and non-nationals. Such a state was regarded as having made itself liable to intervention by any state or coalition of states that were prepared to act. Such intervention has frequently been surrounded by controversy, mainly because humanitarian justifications were oftentimes a none-too-subtle alibi for meddling motivated by strategic, economic or political interests. Even when objectives were more laudable, the cultural arrogance and paternalism of intervening powers

undermined the credibility of their claim to be acting on behalf of affected populations rather than protecting their own self-interests.

The noted international lawyer Ian Brownlie ([1963](#): 340) concluded that ‘no genuine case of humanitarian intervention has occurred with the possible exception of the occupation of Syria in 1860 and 1861’. The scale of the atrocities in that case may well have warranted intervention – more than 11 000 Maronite Christians were killed and 100 000 made homeless in a single four-week period. But by the time some 12 000 European soldiers arrived, the violence was largely over, and after undertaking some relief activities the troops withdrew.

At the end of the nineteenth century, some legal commentators argued that a doctrine of humanitarian intervention existed in customary [international law](#), but a considerable number of their colleagues adamantly disagreed. At present, contemporary legal scholars continue to debate the significance of these conclusions. Some argue that the doctrine was clearly established in state practice prior to 1945, and that only the parameters, rather than the existence, of that doctrine are subject to question. Other public international lawyers reject this claim, pointing to the inconsistency of state practice – particularly in the twentieth century – and the substantial number of legal scholars who have categorically rejected the proposition.

The UN Security Council was paralysed for many of the Cold War years because a veto by any one of the permanent five members (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, China and the Soviet Union) meant no binding decision could be made (see [Chapters 20](#) and [21](#)). The end of the Cold War permitted more robust decisions than previously; these abruptly catapulted the United Nations to the centre of the international conflict-management business. In a departure from previous practice, in the 1990s the world body either authorised or subcontracted to regional organisations the use of military force to

protect human beings (Durch [2006](#); Howard [2008](#)). Beginning with the 1991 authorisation to use all necessary means to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of the Gulf War, a host of Security Council decisions authorised the use of force for human protection purposes in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kosovo and East Timor. As a result, many NGO and UN humanitarian agencies were able to engage in activities to protect and succour populations in insecure arenas, whereas earlier the ICRC had had a virtual monopoly in such circumstances.

Whether the results of these ‘military–civilian interactions’ have, on balance, been beneficial (Weiss [2005a](#)) or counter-productive (Chandler [2002](#); Rieff [2002](#)) remains controversial. However, the earlier notion that the Security Council could not apply the provisions of Chapter VII of the [UN Charter](#) to make binding decisions about humanitarian crises became moot (see [Box 31.3](#)). The Council effectively set precedents in taking action on numerous cases by labelling humanitarian disasters ‘threats to international peace and security’, the agreed basis in the Charter to justify such decisions. This power of self-definition explains why there are continual demands to reform the composition and procedures of the Security Council, but to date no agreement has been reached because all the proposals create as many problems as they solve (Weiss [2005b](#)).

**Box 31.3: Key texts**

**Chapter VII of the UN Charter**

**Chapter VII: Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression**

**Article 39**

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any

threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.

#### **Article 41**

The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give force to its decisions ...

#### **Article 42**

Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security ...

While this is not the place to discuss them, the Security Council also made decisions under the UN Charter's Chapter VII to authorise coercive measures short of military force. Economic sanctions and international criminal pursuit, beginning in the 1990s, are not usually considered part of humanitarian intervention *per se*. However, they too oblige the entire UN membership to take specific actions against the expressed will of a targeted state, and a partial or total justification for many was humanitarian. In what was called 'the sanctions decade' (Biersteker, Eckert and Tourinho [2016](#); Cortright and Lopez [2000](#)), Security Council decisions reflected the specific desire to elicit dramatic changes by the targeted regimes whose policies were creating humanitarian disasters.

Ironically, the sometimes catastrophic humanitarian consequences of sanctions on innocent civilian populations within targeted states (Weiss et al. [1997](#)) led the Security Council away from the comprehensive measures toward ‘smart sanctions’ (Cortright et al. [2002](#); Biersteker, Eckert and Tourinho [2016](#)). It also created a number of international criminal tribunals, beginning in the early 1990s with those for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and in 2002 states created the International Criminal Court (Goldstone and Smith [2015](#)). While many of those brought to the dock had been responsible for war crimes and other crimes against humanity – including the former presidents of Serbia and Liberia – and warrants were issued for the sitting presidents of Sudan and Libya, international criminal pursuit is also not typically classified as part of humanitarian intervention.

Clearly the notion of coming to the rescue of affected populations evolved substantially before the appearance of a well-developed international system with institutions responsible for maintaining international order and protecting human rights. That the ‘H’ word was all too often a transparent pretext for interest-based rather than unselfish intervention continues to colour the contemporary debate. As Ramesh Thakur ([2001](#): 31; see also Ayoob [2004](#)) points out, developing countries ‘are neither amused nor mindful at being lectured on universal human values by those who failed to practice the same during European colonialism and now urge them to cooperate in promoting “global” human rights norms’.

## **The responsibility to protect**

Since it appeared as the title of the 2001 report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), the responsibility to protect

(R2P) has shaped international responses to egregious violations of human rights (see [Box 31.4](#)). Given R2P's declared goal to change the terms of humanitarian discourse and the controversy that continues to swirl around it, questions arise as to how far it presently is from the status of an agreed international [norm](#) as part of 'revolutions in sovereignty' (Philpott [2001](#)). Most importantly, R2P attempted to move beyond the toxic topic of humanitarian intervention.

**Box 31.4:** Key texts

***The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS [2001](#))***

Basic principles:

**A** State sovereignty implies responsibility, and the primary responsibility for the protection of its people lies with the state itself.

**B** Where a population is suffering serious harm, as a result of internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect.

Available at [http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS\\_Report.pdf](http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/ICISS_Report.pdf)

In referring to 'two sovereignties' (that is, of individuals and of states) in several speeches, UN Secretary-General from 1997–2006 Kofi Annan ([1999](#)) created unease and even open hostility – especially among numerous countries of the global South. They disputed his contention that individual sovereignty and

human rights could on occasion trump sacrosanct state sovereignty. Beginning with the international response in northern Iraq in 1991 to protect Kurds from Saddam Hussein's regime in the aftermath of the Gulf War, largely circular and poisonous tirades took place around Security Council decisions about the agency, timing, legitimacy, means, circumstances and advisability of using military force to protect human beings. The R2P agenda, however, comprises more complex and subtle responses to mass atrocities than the use of force, ranging from prevention to post-conflict rebuilding to protecting civilians at risk (Badescu and Weiss [2010](#); Bellamy [2009](#); Evans [2008](#); Thakur [2006](#); Weiss [2007](#)).

The central [normative](#) tenet of the responsibility to protect, first envisaged in the 2001 ICISS report and its accompanying research volume (Weiss and Hubert [2001](#)) and later embraced by the consensus decision at the September 2005 UN World Summit (Bellamy [2006](#)), is that state sovereignty is contingent and not absolute (United Nations [2005](#): paras 138–40). Each state has a responsibility to protect its citizens from large-scale [ethnic cleansing](#), mass killings and other conscience-shocking suffering. If a state is unable or unwilling to exercise that responsibility, however, or is a perpetrator of mass atrocities, its sovereignty is abrogated, while the responsibility to protect devolves to the international community of states, ideally acting through the Security Council. The twofold responsibility in this framework – internal and external – draws upon earlier work by Francis Deng and Roberta Cohen on 'sovereignty as responsibility' to alleviate the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Cohen and Deng [1998](#); Deng et al. [1996](#); see also Weiss and Korn [2006](#)).

The ICISS, as well as the World Summit, consciously sought to distance itself from the perceived anachronistic language of humanitarian intervention. Both emphasised the need to do everything possible to prevent mass atrocities so that deploying military force would be an option only after other alternatives had

been considered and had failed. In the Summit's language, such actions would only apply to cases of '[genocide](#), war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity'.

The removal of the 'H' adjective from intervention underlined a point that was of particular significance to former colonial peoples: the merits of particular situations should be evaluated rather than blindly given the imprimatur of 'humanitarian'. Because of the number of sins justified by the use of that adjective during the painful period of colonialism, this change was more than semantic. The language marked a dramatic shift away from the rights of outsiders to intervene towards the rights of populations at risk to receive succour and protection and the responsibility of outsiders to come to their rescue.

Gareth Evans ([2008](#): 28) calculates that the evolution has taken place in 'a blink of the eye in the history of ideas'. Whether one agrees or not with that perspective, the developments since the release of the ICISS report in December 2001 suggest that R2P has moved from the prose and passion of an international expert commission to a mainstay of international public policy. The responsibility to protect also has potential to evolve in customary international law and to contribute to ongoing conversations about the responsibilities of states if they are to be legitimate sovereigns.

The advance of rhetoric is impressive, and theorising has also begun to catch up (Thakur and Maley [2015](#)). In 2004, during the preparations for the UN's sixtieth anniversary, the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change ([2004](#)) issued its report, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, which endorsed 'the emerging norm that there is a collective international responsibility to protect' ([2004](#): para. 203). Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan ([2005b](#)) lauded it in his 2005 report, *In Larger Freedom*. The most significant normative advance came in September 2005, when more than 150 heads of state and government gathered in New York unanimously

supported the R2P. In addition to the official blessing of the World Summit's separate section that was approved by the UN General Assembly in October 2005, the Security Council also made subsequent and specific references to R2P: the April 2006 Resolution 1674 on the protection of civilians in armed conflict expressly 'reaffirms the provisions of paragraphs 138 and 139'; the August 2006 Resolution 1706 on Darfur was the first to link R2P to a particular conflict; and the 2011 Resolution 1973 approved the no-fly zone in Libya. Since that time, numerous resolutions from both the Security Council and the Human Rights Council have referred specifically to the R2P. (For these and other updates, see <http://www.globalr2p.org/search?q=security+council+resolutions>.) In addition, then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a special adviser for the prevention of genocide and a special adviser tasked with promoting R2P. The Secretary-General has referred to R2P as one of his priorities, and in January 2009 released a comprehensive report, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect* (United Nations [2009](#)). This report puts forward the details of 'three pillars' for implementing R2P: (1) the protection responsibilities of individual states; (2) international assistance and capacity-building for feeble states; and (3) timely and decisive international responses when states fail to meet their responsibilities toward civilian populations (United Nations [2009](#)).

The annual UN General Assembly debates, in the form of interactive dialogues, began in 2009 and subsequently have represented the latest fledgling steps in R2P's normative journey. In preparation, the states members of the 'Group of Friends' of the responsibility to protect in New York, the UN special adviser and civil society picked up the mantle from previous norm entrepreneurs and mobilised around the Secretary-General's report. Initially, many feared that the 2009 debate would produce a resolution diluting the September 2005 commitments, or normative backpedalling: *The Economist* ([2009](#)) described opponents who 'have been busily sharpening their knives' on the eve of the

debate. A troubled start had critics trying to paint R2P in [imperialistic](#) colours, including the opening harangue by the Nicaraguan president of the General Assembly, Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann (*Economist* [2009](#)), who went so far as to dub R2P 'redecorated colonialism', and suggested that 'a more accurate name for R2P would be the right to intervene'.

However, a close reading of remarks by state representatives and observers who have taken the floor over the years have shown faint support for undermining the responsibility to protect. Virtually all supported its implementation, with only four countries directly questioning the 2005 World Summit agreement – the usual suspects of Cuba, Nicaragua, Sudan and Venezuela. Of particular relevance were remarks from major regional powers that previously had been reticent or even hostile, including Brazil, Nigeria, India, South Africa and Japan.

Despite disagreement and contestation, the most sensible interpretation is that the responsibility to protect is at the beginning of an arduous normative process. All humanitarian initiatives – including the venerable Geneva Conventions after more than a century and a half – require considerable time before new norms stimulate routine change and compliance. As David Rieff ([2008](#): 41) summarises, 'there is considerable evidence of changing norms, though not, of course, changing facts on the ground'. Or in the words of Gary Bass ([2008](#): 382), 'We are all atrocitarians now—but so far only in words, and not yet in deeds.'

### **Responsibility to protect (R2P) and the prevention of mass atrocities**

#### **Noel Morada**

The idea of the [responsibility to protect \(R2P\)](#) was put forward in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

(ICISS), which conducted a series of intensive collaborative research and consultations on how the international community should respond to humanitarian crisis situations across the globe. This stemmed from various humanitarian crises in the 1990s (e.g. Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sudan) that forced the United Nations and its member states to consider seriously the appropriate principles and mechanisms to respond effectively to these problems. R2P redefines state sovereignty as also including the responsibility of the state to protect its people or populations against mass atrocities. Specifically, it includes the responsibility to prevent – that is, to address the direct or root causes of internal conflicts or humanitarian crises – as well as the responsibility to react – that is, respond to humanitarian crisis situations with appropriate measures, including military intervention as a last resort – and responsibility to rebuild – that is, provide assistance for post-conflict rehabilitation and peacebuilding. R2P as a political norm also advances that, if states fail to protect their own people, the responsibility shifts to the international community to respond to humanitarian crisis situations in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Initially, a number of developing states were quite uncomfortable with the idea of R2P because it goes against the traditional principle of promoting respect for state sovereignty and non-intervention. Some of them feared that it could be used and abused by powerful Western countries as a pretext for intervention in other states even as the ICISS report gave heavy emphasis on the coercive aspect of R2P. There were also concerns about how the United Nations would decide on when to invoke R2P to justify military intervention in humanitarian crisis situations.

In 2005, following the World Summit of Leaders in the United Nations, a consensus on R2P emerged, which was reflected in paragraphs 138–140 of the World Summit Outcome Document. In particular, member states agreed that the responsibility to protect rests primarily on states and that the international community should assist states in building the capacity to prevent genocide and mass atrocities. They also agreed that R2P should cover only four crimes – genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity – and that international assistance to states should focus on prevention measures such as developing early warning capabilities. It is important to note that the pertinent paragraphs in the Outcome Document did not mention military intervention per se and focused on the use of ‘appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, and other peaceful means’ to protect populations from the four crimes. Nonetheless, it also included reference to member states of the United Nations being prepared to take collective action ‘in a timely and decisive manner’ in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which allows for military intervention ‘on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate’. This third pillar of R2P remains controversial, as many developing states – including China – regard it as an opening for misuse or abuse to justify intervention. For example, in August 2008 Russia inappropriately invoked R2P to justify its military intervention in Ossetia, Georgia, while France, for the wrong reasons, used it to call for collective international humanitarian intervention against the Myanmar military junta in May 2008 following Cyclone Nargis, when Myanmar refused to accept humanitarian assistance from Western countries.

Through the mediation of the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations \(ASEAN\)](#), however, the military junta relented and allowed international

humanitarian assistance to come in through the regional organisation. Even so, some member states in ASEAN remain reluctant supporters of R2P, as they still cling to the organisation's traditional norms of respecting state sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. Post-colonial states in the region are also facing a number of armed challenges to the legitimacy of the state, even as they are also in the process of building nations from multi-ethnic societies. Indeed, these pose serious challenges to the exercise of state sovereignty with corresponding responsibility to protect populations from the four crimes. At the same time, the region has experienced a range of human rights violations and mass atrocity crimes, notably in the case of Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, East Timor prior to its independence and the Maguindanao massacre in the Philippines in 2009.

More than ten years since its adoption in 2005, R2P still faces a number of challenges with regard to its implementation. Specifically, in the aftermath of the Libyan crisis in 2011, the use of coercive force under R2P's Pillar 3 (timely and decisive response) has been scrutinised by a number of member states in the United Nations. Brazil, for example, proposed an initiative called Responsibility while Protecting (RwP) that calls for greater transparency and accountability in implementing resolutions by the Security Council, especially with regard to the use of military intervention. RwP also underscored the importance of not using R2P as a pretext for regime change. Indeed, the perceived over-stepping of the mandate by NATO forces in Libya that led to the ousting of Colonel Gaddafi contributed to the stalemate among the permanent members in the Security Council over Syria. Consequently, an initiative was put forward by France and Mexico in 2013 called the ACT Code of Conduct (Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency); among other

things, it called for accountability among members of the Security Council in voting against resolutions in situations involving mass atrocity crimes. The ACT is an expanded version of the Small Five (S5) initiative that called on the permanent members to voluntarily restrain from the use of veto powers in resolutions invoking R2P.

Other challenges to implementing R2P also include atrocities perpetrated by non-state actors espousing extremist ideologies or religious beliefs, and who advocate the use of violence. For example, since 2014 the rise of [Islamic State \(IS\)](#) – has exacerbated the suffering of peoples in that part of the Middle East and contributed to the increased number of internally displaced persons and outflow of refugees to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Europe. In turn, this has caused some backlash against migrants and refugees in Europe, especially following terrorist attacks in France and Belgium since 2015. In Asia, the emergence of Buddhist nationalists in Myanmar and Islamic extremists in Indonesia has led to increased communal tensions and political violence in these countries since 2012. These groups have also utilised social media as a major vehicle to promote their beliefs and perpetuate intolerance through hate speech.

As an emerging political norm, R2P must be internalised at various levels – international, regional, national, and local or community – in order for the idea to resonate deeply and effectively promote the protection of populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. States may sign international agreements or conventions on human rights and international humanitarian law, or become parties to the International Criminal Court. But these are inadequate for preventing the commission of the four crimes if there are no corresponding domestic laws that punish perpetrators and states

overall remain incapable of addressing the root causes and preconditions for mass atrocities. In the context of conflict-prone, multi-ethnic societies in Southeast Asia, for example, so much may be expected of states whose legitimacy is continually being challenged while they continue to invoke the traditional definition of sovereignty and non-interference. At the end of the day, R2P is about changing the mindset of political leaders: that sovereignty, more than a right, is also a responsibility. And the international community of nations must remain vigilant to ensure that perpetrators of mass atrocities must be held accountable for their crimes.

## Conclusion

While we normally do not think of anything other than positive precedents as laying the groundwork for normative advances, in fact both applications and misapplications – in rhetoric and in reality – can foster normative consolidation. While this chapter has analysed the accumulation of positive precedents, it is worth noting that the humanitarian and R2P labels were misapplied to the invasion of Iraq (after the links to al-Qaeda and [weapons of mass destruction \(WMDs\)](#) disappeared) as well as to the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, and to foot-dragging that same year by the Myanmar authorities after Cyclone Nargis.

With the possible exception of the international reactions to the violence following the December 2007 elections in Kenya (Weiss [2010](#)), R2P lacked adequate specific applications in practice and concrete examples of compliant behaviour until the dramatic 2011 action to protect civilians in Libya. As such, it

is also worthwhile to track actors' reactions and changes in discourse produced by misapplications of the norm. In fact, debate and contestation after misapplications and abuses can constitute steps in the direction of norm advancement, just as the positive precedents of the 1990s put the issue on the international policy map (Badescu and Weiss [2010](#)). Misuses and violations prompt discussion and contribute to clarifying the scope and boundaries of a new norm. In turn, such clarifications can foster compliance and what ultimately is the desired impact of this norm – namely, increased protection of affected populations.

It is certainly premature to agree with David Rieff ([2011](#); see also Weiss [2014](#)), who has declared *resquiescat in pace* (rest in peace) for R2P. However, 'R2P is not about to die', as Alex Bellamy ([2009](#): 12) notes. 'Indeed, it is not even on life support.' Despite ongoing grouching about the norm's relevance and purpose, the General Assembly debates and the Security Council's 2011 action in Libya suggest that the responsibility to protect is unlikely to be dislodged from [multilateral](#) diplomatic discourse. At the same time, it would be foolhardy to assume that governments and humanitarians will react similarly in all emergencies. Politics and national-interest calculations explain why we sometimes do, and sometimes do not, respond to conscience-shocking humanitarian disasters.

Hence the term humanitarian 'impulse' is the more accurate description of likely efforts to come to the rescue of strangers, although humanitarian 'imperative' has become the preferred description within virtually all ethical and policy discourse in the field (Weiss [2016](#)). The latter entails an obligation to treat victims similarly and react to all crises consistently – in effect, to deny the relevance of politics, which consists of drawing lines, and weighing options and available resources. Yet humanitarian action remains desirable, not obligatory.

The humanitarian impulse is permissive; the humanitarian imperative is peremptory.

## Discussion questions

**31.1** What does ‘humanitarianism’ mean in the context of international relations?

**31.2** Do states have a responsibility to protect their own citizens?

**31.3** Does international society have a responsibility to prevent a state from systematically violating the human rights of its own citizens?

**31.4** Does international society have a responsibility to come to the rescue of civilians residing in a state that is committing mass atrocities against them?

**31.5** Can and should force be used against sovereign states for humanitarian reasons?

**31.6** Is there a norm of humanitarian intervention in international relations?

**31.7** Is R2P an instrument of Western imperialism?

## *Further reading*

Barnett, Michael and Weiss, Thomas G. (eds) 2008, *Humanitarianism in question: Politics, power, ethics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. A comprehensive collection of essays by leading scholars on the manifold dimensions of humanitarianism and armed intervention.

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Barnett, Michael and Weiss, Thomas G. 2011, *Humanitarianism contested: Where angels fear to tread*, London: Routledge. A succinct but sophisticated

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*analysis of ongoing dilemmas and tensions that have accompanied humanitarianism since its origins in the nineteenth century.*

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Bellamy, Alex J. 2009, *The responsibility to protect: The global effort to end mass atrocities*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *A lucid and thoughtful account and evaluation of the rise of R2P.*

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*Global Responsibility to Protect*, a quarterly journal published since 2009.

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Hehir, Aidan, 2012, *The Responsibility to Protect: Rhetoric, Reality and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. *A sceptical interpretation of the norm's advance.*

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Hoffman, Peter J. and Thomas G. Weiss 2017, *Humanitarianism, war, and politics: Solferino to Syria and beyond*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. *Going beyond so-called new wars, it probes the profound changes in the culture and capacities that underpin the sector and alter the meaning of humanitarianism, reinventions that constitute 'revolutions in humanitarian affairs'.*

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Holzgrefe, J.L. and Keohane, Robert O. (eds) 2003, *Humanitarian intervention: Ethical, legal and political dilemmas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *A useful collection of essays on the ethical, legal and political debates surrounding humanitarian intervention.*

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Orford, Anne 2011, *International authority and the responsibility to protect*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An authoritative international legal interpretation of R2P.*

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Pattison, James, 2010, *Humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect: Who should intervene?* Oxford: Oxford University Press. *An analysis that does not shy away from the importance of military force.*

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Weiss, Thomas G. 2013. *Humanitarian business*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *A discussion of the market forces driving the enterprise.*

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Wheeler, Nicholas J. 2000, *Saving strangers: Humanitarian intervention in international society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. *Engages English School theory to compare Cold War and post-Cold War instances of humanitarian intervention.*

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Zolo, Danilo 2002, *Invoking humanity: War, law and global order*, trans. Federico and Gordon Poole, London: Continuum. *A formidable critique of humanitarian intervention by leading Italian realist.*

# Human rights



**Anthony J. Langlois**

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## Introduction

This chapter examines the rise and growth of [human rights](#). First, it discusses the historical development of human rights. Second, it outlines how human rights are understood today. Third, it explains how the [liberal](#) universalism that lies behind human rights has come up against cultural resistance. Finally, the chapter touches on some challenges that lie ahead in the struggle for human rights.

The concept of human rights has become one of the central political doctrines of international politics. This is a remarkable state of affairs, given that only seventy years ago the idea, while championed by some, had little or no traction on the behaviour of states with one another. The end of World War II was the key marker in the birth of the human rights movement as we know it today. Prior to that [war](#), human rights – or ‘the rights of man’ as they were known then – had few political supporters in international relations. The doctrines of [realism](#), or [realpolitik](#), seemed an accurate description of international politics and stood opposed to the kinds of [idealism](#) and moralism that the idea of human rights was thought to embody. Importantly, too, the idea of universal rights had fallen on hard times in intellectual terms, being subject to various critiques which undermined its authority and persuasive power.

World War II was one of a series of tragedies that gripped the world in the twentieth century. The particularly horrific atrocities manifested by Germany through the Holocaust precipitated a radical change in the structures of international politics, and in the place that moral concerns were given within those structures. The [international system](#) underwent a crisis of legitimacy, and one component of the restoration of that legitimacy was the emergence of the modern human rights movement. Above all else, this movement sought to establish minimum standards for the behaviour of states in order for them to have legitimate standing in the international community.

These standards were expressed through, and were to be monitored and implemented by, a new organisation founded after World War II, the [United Nations](#). Human rights were articulated in the [UN Charter](#). In 1948, the key document of the human rights movement was promulgated by the United Nations: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document was created pursuant to an international drafting effort, which sought to capture in

declaratory form the essence of those values that, when adopted, would prevent the atrocities of World War II from being repeated.

From the beginning, however, there were political difficulties. The Declaration was itself not binding in [international law](#): it was a document of aspiration in the first instance. Second, the document did not receive universal acceptance among the states of the post-war era. The Soviet Union and five of its allies refused to endorse it, along with South Africa and Saudi Arabia. These refusals were not surprising, not least because – despite the universalist rhetoric of the human rights movement – the values embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are a distilled version of the political [liberalism](#) which animated the allied West.

The greatest obstacle of them all was that of giving human rights teeth: a genuine capacity to do something other than make pious statements about how the peoples of the world might live together more harmoniously. In the first instance, this capacity was found in the drafting of two international treaties, known as covenants. These were the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These were promulgated in 1966 – almost two decades after the original Declaration. They had to wait a further decade before a sufficient number of states had signed up for the treaty to take any kind of effect.

There have been many other human rights instrumentalities that have been developed under the auspices of the United Nations since the promulgation of the Covenants – some of the more well-known are those on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (see [Box 32.1](#)). Choosing to sign and ratify these instruments, as with the original Covenants, is discretionary for states; many chose not to. It nonetheless represents a major shift in international politics that all states have signed on to at least one such human rights law instrument. Despite the

inevitable problems of compliance and politicisation, this fact nonetheless represents a significant change in the politics and structures of international relations since the end of World War II.

**Box 32.1:** Discussion points

**Key human rights instruments of the United Nations**

- United Nations Charter (1945)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
- Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)

**The historical development of an idea**

As noted above, the idea of human rights was invoked after World War II as a way of expressing both moral outrage and a determination to prevent the recurrence of the events that provoked that outrage. But this raises the question of why it was that human rights were not already there, in action, to prevent the atrocities of that and other wars. If they are indeed *universal* rights – the rights of all peoples in all places at all times – why were they not available in the lexicon of international politics until after World War II?

The term ‘universal human rights’ is a modernised, updated version of a number of other terms that have, in fact, been around for a very long time. These are the ideas of natural law, natural right and the rights of ‘man’. Together, these ideas provide the foundation for many of the political structures that we in the West take for granted today. And it was these ideas that the West looked to in its crisis of legitimacy after World War II. The difficulty is that these ideas themselves are not unproblematic; indeed, we can see that a number of the key political problems associated with human rights today have their roots in the way in which these older political and moral ideas were appropriated by the modern human rights movement.

The Nuremberg and Tokyo trials held after World War II convicted people of committing crimes against humanity. Natural law was the basis for this justice. This same natural law is often appealed to as the basis for human rights. But it is by looking at this appeal that we can see what some of the difficulties with the idea of human rights are, and why it is that the idea – or the earlier forms of the idea – had come to be viewed as problematic. The idea of natural law is that there is a moral or ethical law that is built into our nature as human beings – in fact, built into the nature of the cosmos. This idea has strong pre-Christian antecedents, but it finds its fullest expression in the Western tradition in Christian theology, to the extent that once Christianity started to be doubted

and repudiated by Western thinkers, the idiom of the natural law was also challenged fundamentally.

The great irony of the history of the human rights idea is that the same historical period furnished both the most damaging criticisms and the most important political victories for the idea. During the period that is known as the [Enlightenment](#), or the Age of Reason, in Western intellectual history, universal rights became both politically efficacious and intellectually passé.

This period was marked by famous rights declarations: 1776 saw the ‘unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America’, and in 1789 we have the French ‘Declaration on the Rights of Man and Citizens’. Rights language was in vogue, and it was making very significant political gains for the new political classes. However, the foundations of these claims were being questioned by many of the philosophers of the day. These thinkers were appealing to new ways of thinking that challenged many of the intellectual pieties of the past. Human reason was the standard to which these thinkers appealed, not class privilege, religious revelation or social authority. And for many, the language of rights, with its foundation in natural law, was too tainted with false premises from older ways of thinking to remain legitimate.

The most famous critique of all from this period, perhaps because of its rhetorical excess, is that put forward by the [Utilitarian](#) thinker Jeremy Bentham. He said, ‘Natural rights is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense – nonsense upon stilts.’ These rights were ‘unreal metaphysical phenomena’. Why so? Again, the common point here is the association with the Christian intellectual tradition. Natural rights came via the natural law, which was given by God. But if you take away God, you appear to have no foundations for natural rights or natural law. The only rights you have are those provided by people through political institutions; all other rights are merely idle talk. As we will see, however, this position has its own difficulties.

From this we can start to answer our earlier question: Why was it that human rights were not there to prevent the atrocities of World War II, if they are universal in the way claimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Our brief excursus into intellectual history – the history of ideas – helps us to see that the idea of rights itself does not stand alone, but is linked to the broader intellectual and political climate of the day. This climate had been unfavourable to the idea of universal rights for some time before the mid-twentieth century. In the eighteenth century, natural rights were in their heyday; by the twentieth century, the idea had lost both its intellectual justification and its political limelight. That was until the atrocities of mid-century, which caused the West to reach into its past for a set of terms that would adequately articulate its sense of moral outrage about what members of its own civilisation had done to one another.

## **The human rights idea today**

It is tempting to respond to these historical considerations by claiming that the development of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) represents a break from the past – both the immediate past of Holocaust atrocity and the longer past of intellectual prevarication about the nature of human rights. The UDHR, it might be said, sets new standards and is justified by the participation of the members of the international community in its creation and extensions via subsequent human rights law instrumentalities. From this viewpoint, troubling ourselves with past philosophical debates about the nature and justification of rights is to miss the main game: that we now have an international human rights [regime](#), mandated and overseen by the United Nations; that this regime sets the

standards for human rights matters; and that this regime has a secure place within the architecture of international politics today.

This argument is one that is called the argument from legal [positivism](#) – and it is not unlike that argued by Jeremy Bentham, as mentioned above. His claim was that the only rights you in fact have are those provided by political institutions. This appeal to the realities of contemporary human rights law as an antidote to the philosophical problems with human rights, however, has serious shortcomings at both the conceptual and the political levels – so much so that if we allow it to stand, we find that the language of human rights itself will fail to play the role that was envisaged for it by those who sought to introduce it as a medium for justice in international politics. To see this, we need to recognise the fatal flaw of the argument from legal positivism.

The legal positivists' way of answering the question, 'What are human rights?' is to point us to international human rights law: to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to the Covenants and to the various other legal instrumentalities that operate at state, regional and international levels. The problem with legal positivism is that, in this manner, it is reductionist: it reduces human rights to these laws. Rather than seeing these laws as instruments that *protect* human rights, human rights are reduced to *being* these instruments. Human rights, then, do not exist whenever these structures are not in place. Human rights are created when these structures are created. Human rights change when these laws change.

Because international human rights law is law that is created by [states](#) working together, and because human rights laws within states are created by states, one of the key consequences of this legal positivist argument – albeit one that is not always immediately apparent – is that human rights can be reduced to the will of the state. If human rights are reduced to laws that are created by states, and states then decide to change those laws, the implication is that human

rights change as well. And the logic here dictates that should states repudiate human rights, these rights go out of existence. But this leaves us powerless against the state when it seeks to act unjustly against people; it leaves us with no defence against the kind of behaviour that led to World War II.

The argument from legal positivism is appealing because it seems to short-circuit the endless debate of moral philosophers about the nature of justice. However, it appears that if we want to ensure justice, we need to appeal to more than the human rights-respecting legal structures that were developed at some point in history; we need to appeal to the moral and philosophical reasons that tell us why such legal structures are good things, and why it is claimed that they are universally good – that is, good for all human beings.

## **The politics of liberal universalism**

It is the universalism of human rights that has made it so powerful as a tool of political and moral critique. The claim is that there are universal moral standards to which the laws of all states should conform. It is this claim to universality that gives human rights their moral bite – it is a claim to something that goes beyond the interests or laws of any given state (or, for that matter, [non-state agent](#)). And, for precisely this reason, it is the claim that this ‘something’, being greater than all of us, applies to all of us. The challenge is to articulate what that ‘something’ is. For the modern human rights movement, the [norms](#) and values that are translated into human rights are derived from the liberal tradition of political thought. It is this tradition that is the inheritor of the notions of natural law and right, and that has transformed them into documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Liberal universalism is a particular kind of universalism (see [Box 32.2](#)). It makes the claim that a certain set of values *should* be applied to all peoples in all states at all times. Thus it is not a claim about [empirical](#) universality – it is not a claim that these values do now exist or can now be seen in all societies; rather, it is a [normative](#) claim that these values can be justified as being good for all human persons, so we should strive to implement them universally.

### **Box 32.2:** Discussion points

#### **The critics of liberal universalism**

Liberal universalism is regularly criticised as an inadequate foundation for the global human rights movement. Some theorists argue that liberalism's focus on individual agency, choice and freedom is too narrow an understanding of what is important about being *human*. For example, some *communitarian* thinkers argue that these values undermine visions of the good life held by many communities and traditions. By contrast, *radicals* suggest that the imperial and racially discriminatory political orders in which liberalism itself was formed, continue to make it unsuitable as the basis for a globally egalitarian polity. [Critical theorists](#) challenge us to go beyond liberalism's bold claims about equality and to examine carefully the political practices, social realities and philosophical ambiguities associated with human rights. Queer approaches demonstrate how thinking about gender, sex and sexuality can show up the instabilities and power relations in the accounts of politics and identity that liberalism casts as placid and normal.

The values in question are liberal values: they are centred around the idea that each individual is important as an individual, and that each individual has equal value and should be free to follow their own interests. The conception of the person that is implied here emerges out of Western political and cultural history. It owes its provenance to such broad movements as the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and pre-eminently the European Enlightenment. The liberal values articulated via the new doctrines of rights were individualistic, rational, universal, secular, democratic and radical. The focus here is squarely on the individual as the building block of society. The individual is conceptualised as a willing self – hence the importance of freedom: I must have the space in which to act the way that I will myself to act (see [Box 32.3](#)). This conception of the individual – often called the transcendental self – is a key aspect of the way in which theorists have justified the universality of human rights. If all human persons have these characteristics, and if these characteristics lead us to posit human rights, then human rights can be universal. In this view, it is the self that is considered to be the core of our humanity, despite all the differences between individuals or groups of individuals – differences such as religion, culture, socialisation and politics.

### **Box 32.3:** Discussion points

#### **Three generations of rights**

**First-generation rights:** These are the civil and political rights that form the basis of the human rights tradition, and that are represented in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These rights emerged to protect the interests and negative liberties of the individual against the power and

encroachment of states. They include rights such as freedom of speech, religion and association.

**Second-generation rights:** This generation of rights represents the recognition that people need a certain set of political and economic circumstances to be provided before they can flourish as human beings – indeed, before they can even properly take advantage of their civil and political rights. The second generation thus includes rights to basic levels of economic subsistence, education and work, among others. These rights are enumerated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

**Third-generation rights:** Also known as group rights, these rights attend more to the communal aspects of human being; thus, these rights extend the reach of human rights to matters such as the recognition of minority groups, social identity and cultural issues. These rights are often provided for by dedicated UN human rights instrumentalities.

This is a key issue, because it is factors such as religion, culture, socialisation and politics that lead people to engage in behaviour that is not acceptable on the basis of human rights standards. It is at this point that the political nature of human rights comes to the fore. One of the consequences of the universalist rhetoric of human rights has been that the political nature of human rights has often remained hidden. The politics of human rights is most often revealed, however, in the transition from the grand claims of universalism

to the very specific changes that need to be made to legal and political systems to make them conform to international human rights standards. The legal instrumentalities of the international human rights regime do not merely urge states to cease behaving in undesirable ways; they prescribe specific standards that must be met.

The universalism of the human rights regime foundered from the very beginning because of these political tensions. The world was prepared to unite in its condemnation of the events of the Holocaust. But agreement on a rights regime that required something more than claiming the moral high ground was harder to come by. The principal disagreement on human rights issues was one that sundered the world, and was aligned with the political and economic differences between the post-war [superpowers](#). The [Cold War](#), among other things, was a dispute about which kinds of rights should take precedence in a given society: political and civil rights, or economic and social rights. Both types of rights were included in the UDHR. Human rights became a pawn in a larger conflict; rights became politicised and for a period the ability of rights discourse to advance the well-being of all persons was severely constrained by the refusal of Soviet and aligned states to accept either the spirit or the letter of human rights law.

More recently a similar set of claims has been played out in the Asian region (see [Box 32.4](#)). In this debate, authoritarian political elites have claimed that because the human rights doctrine is centred around the Western idea of the individual as the pre-eminent building block of society, it is a doctrine that has less application in their societies. In Asian societies, so it was claimed, the community rather than the individual is pre-eminent. This means that the rights and freedoms of individuals are always subservient to the state, and not vice versa. A similar debate has been had in other regions of the world – notably Africa.

### **Box 32.4:** Discussion points

#### **Asian values**

The 'Asian values' debate followed the end of the Cold War and a period of unprecedented economic growth in the Asian economies. The debate was spearheaded by political elites from Malaysia, Singapore, China, Burma, Indonesia and Japan. The principal claim was that because Asian societies have different cultural backgrounds from those of the West, they need not be subject to the same standards of human rights and democracy as those asserted by the West. The argument from culture fails, however, because the claims of political elites to be the only legitimate spokespersons for a culture are spurious. Many Asians, including some political leaders, spoke out against Asian values, demonstrating that cultures are dynamic and contested, and cannot easily be enlisted by the powerful [status quo](#) political elite.

Along with the argument from culture was an argument from economic development: that human rights needed to be rolled out sequentially, and that economic and social rights come before political and civil liberties. Asia is not as economically developed as the West, and therefore should not be expected to live by the West's standards. But the real question here is not whether rights must develop sequentially, but rather whether the provision of economic rights *requires* the deprivation of political rights.

The threshold issue is also important. Singapore, for example, is clearly well developed, yet is reluctant to give its citizens full first-generation rights. Asian states also argued using the principles of state [sovereignty](#), claiming that the norm of non-intervention protects them from external critique. The Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s saw the end of the

Asian values debate as an expression of political hubris; this, however, does not mean the end of the issue. Asia is a broad region with many diverse values systems that do not all sit easily with the international human rights regime, even when they are not being exploited by self-interested political elites. How to manage such global pluralism is one of the key challenges facing the doctrine of human rights.

At stake in these debates is the idea that a cultural, religious or philosophical tradition that is less disposed to viewing individual rights favourably may be put forward as a legitimate alternative way of organising society. The outcome of these alternatives is that many of the standards claimed by international human rights law may come into question. Particular issues that arise relate to female [emancipation](#), religious freedom, the rights of children, family and criminal law, the standing of social minorities (indigenous peoples, gays and lesbians, and others) and various political and economic freedoms.

In most cases, the legitimacy of this debate is brought into question because the proponents of these views tend to be the same strongmen who run the countries in an authoritarian fashion. A conflict of interest is immediately apparent, in that the arguments presented serve to preserve the status quo of the political elites and their interests. Moreover, dissenting voices are not difficult to find. Indeed, it is these voices that are the more significant and interesting, and that represent the real challenge to the universal claims of liberal values, for while these dissenters criticise their own governments, they may also have reservations about the liberal predisposition of international human rights standards. Thus we see, for example, religious organisations from all the world religions crafting alternative bills of rights that diverge on crucial key issues

from those of the United Nations. With the renewed salience of religion to international affairs since the end of the Cold War, these groups and movements represent a significant political challenge to the prevailing international human rights regime.

**Box 32.5: Case study**

**Sexual orientation and gender identity**

Individuals and groups of people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), who do not match what is taken to be ‘the norm’ in their society, or who in some way are thought to be ‘non-conforming’ in relation to prevailing social expectations around sex, sexuality and gender, are regularly and routinely the victims of human rights abuse. This abuse often takes the form of physical violence – bullying, bashings, violent murders and torture. It can also take other forms: workplace discrimination, and the denial of access to education, employment, legal representation, or healthcare.

Despite this, there has been great resistance at the international level, and indeed in a large number of states, to institutionalising protections for people of diverse sexuality and gender. The United Nations does not have a human rights instrument that specialises in SOGI, in the way that it does for women, migrant workers, refugees, Indigenous peoples or children, among others. Existing UN instruments fail to capture the way in which lesbians, gays, bisexuals, queers and other sexual and gender non-conforming individuals may suffer human rights abuse *because* of these aspects of their identity or behaviour. These instruments also often include references to public order or morality, which are easily used against SOGI populations.

The absence of SOGI human rights protection has recently been taken up by the United Nations as a critical issue. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon described it as ‘one of the great, neglected challenges of our time’. Under his leadership, the United Nations launched a major global educational campaign on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) rights called ‘Free and Equal’ (2012). Despite polarised views between states, various fora within the United Nations have voted in favour of LGBTI human rights measures. This can be seen most constructively in outcomes from the Human Rights Council, which has twice voted to request reports from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity (UNHCR [2011](#), [2015](#)). These reports document and benchmark the abuses suffered by LGBT and intersex persons, as well as the protections that exist for them. Despite some positive developments between these reports, the most recent indicates that ‘continuing, pervasive, violent abuse, harassment and discrimination’ are experienced in all regions (UNHRC [2015](#)). In 2016 the Human Rights Council created a new UN Special Procedure, establishing the office of an Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). The debates and votes that led to the creation of this special procedure illustrated the extent of disagreement and discord that exists between states on this human rights issue. A core group of Latin American states initiated the process, and were opposed strongly by representatives of the Organisation of Islamic States. A rear-guard action by an African group of nations to suspend the SOGI Expert’s appointment was overturned by support for a resolution by Latin American and Caribbean nations to support the SOGI Expert mandate.

For LGBTI and SOGI advocates, the central issue here is that human rights are universal: they apply to *all* people, including people with diverse sexualities and gender identities. Opponents of reform and change often make appeals to traditional morality, public order and the protection of the traditional family; they commonly uphold doctrines that reject the ways of life lived by people of diverse SOGI. This disagreement should signal quite clearly the way in which human rights, and in particular human rights for LGBTI people, are part of a more complex political landscape; it should also signal the disingenuous nature of some of these appeals. Disagreements over sexuality and gender (or any other contentious issue), no matter how strong, deep or forceful, are not sufficient to legitimate or justify the abuse of the human rights of any person or group of persons.

## **The future of human rights**

The concept of human rights has proven to be a revolutionary political tool for those concerned with ethical standards in international politics. While human rights has often been derided as ‘soft’, because of its fundamental subservience to sovereignty in international affairs, it has nonetheless changed the landscape of international politics since the end of World War II. The United Nations and other human rights organisations have been at the forefront of this transformation of international politics that, along with developments in the international political economy, have introduced new and powerful non-state actors into the international arena. Moreover, human rights has become central to the standard-setting rhetoric of all states, and while in many cases critics will

be frustrated at the ‘it’s just words’ nature of this development, in many other cases human rights standards-setting has led to the creation of institutions that have in turn led to transformations in the processes of both domestic and international politics. Institutionally, then, human rights has become an entrenched fixture in both domestic and international politics (see [Box 32.6](#)).

**Box 32.6:** Discussion points

**Human rights promotion: Difficult cases**

Since the establishment of the UN human rights regime, Australia has been an important human rights supporter on the global stage. However, different Australian governments have had different policy approaches to the issue of human rights, ranging from more liberal internationalist perspectives to the more conservative, realist approaches. Controversy about method often focuses on difficult cases. The current Australian government has chosen to use the mechanism of ‘dialogue’ in order to engage with some difficult cases: China, Vietnam, Laos and Iran are countries that have been involved with dialogue processes. In a similar vein, Australia has also engaged Myanmar by offering human rights workshops there. These policy responses by government represent a particular way of engaging with states that have poor human rights records. They are controversial policy responses because, while they seek to support the UN human rights regime in general terms, they are not conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. Here, the fundamental question is whether more is gained for human rights by using a [bilateral](#) policy approach rather than one of engagement via international human rights regimes. A second fundamental question also arises from these examples: to what extent do you promote human rights

by direct confrontation over rights-abusive state behaviour, and to what extent do you try to change that behaviour by indirect engagement in other areas? In addition to the states mentioned above, Australia's relationship with Indonesia is a key illustration of this issue, in particular through the process that led to East Timor's independence, and with respect to Australia's policy towards other regions of Indonesia that have strong separatist movements, members of which routinely suffer human rights abuses at the behest of state institutions.

Political challenges remain. The key one is directly linked to the main conceptual challenges regarding the nature of human rights. Our answer to the question 'What are human rights?' will lead us directly to substantive issues about what values should be enshrined by our human rights laws and institutions. Some countries, for example, press for different legal systems for members of different religions. This has implication for the way in which we think about the universality of freedom of religion, of women's rights, of children's rights and of criminal law. This, in turn, leads to troubling questions about how different human rights regimes should interact with one another, and about how people who cross jurisdictions will be treated in different places: is it possible to speak of human rights being universal when your rights appear to change as your geography changes?

The liberal universalism of human rights, which stands as the foundation of the international human rights regime, is under challenge in these various ways and others. The key developments in the future of human rights will lie with the way in which the philosophical, institutional and political issues entwined at the heart of this challenge are engaged over the coming decades.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the ways in which the concept of human rights has become one of the central doctrines of global politics. It has examined the institutional development of human rights through the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and considered the importance of the philosophical justification of human rights and the challenges that this task presents – particularly in the face of global cultural diversity. The universalist political liberalism that underlies the human rights movement has been contested by various constituencies, and the way in which the movement responds will shape the future of the global politics of human rights.

## **Discussion questions**

- 32.1 Are human rights a Western prejudice?
- 32.2 Are there ‘Asian values’? How, if at all, do they impact on human rights?
- 32.3 Why have human rights grown in stature and popularity in recent decades?
- 32.4 Is the prevailing international human rights regime effective?
- 32.5 Should all sovereign states be compelled to apply human rights standards to their own citizens?
- 32.6 What is the best way of ensuring human rights for people with ‘non-conforming’ sexual orientation or gender identity?
- 32.7 Should human rights be balanced against the demands of security?

*Further reading*

Freeman, Michael 2011, *Human rights*, Cambridge: Polity Press. *A very good overview of human rights.*

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Langlois, Anthony 2001, *The politics of justice and human rights: Southeast Asia and universalist theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *A theoretically informed account of human rights and cultural difference.*

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# Migration and refugees



**Sara E. Davies**

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## Introduction

The first section of this chapter looks at how the two terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ came to be defined as distinct from each other in the context of the modern state. As the reification of borders intensified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, citizenship became an essential part of ‘belonging’ to a state as well as indicating the strength of the state itself. Hence, the categorisation of

those ‘outside’ the state developed as a way of ascertaining who belonged and who did not. The second section examines how states define and categorise refugees through laws that seek to contain and limit their flow. The third section is concerned with the consequences of limiting the definition of a refugee, which has led to an unequal burden between developed and developing states. The final section canvasses the various options presented to reduce the present imbalance, where the vast majority of the world’s refugees eke out an existence in refugee camps in developing countries. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that the choices made by states in border protection become the key determinants of how refugees will be accepted. Adherence to international refugee law will not necessarily address all the problems associated with refugees, but nor will seeing refugees as unwanted intruders in contrast to ‘desirable’ migrants.

## **States, refugees and immigrants**

Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard campaigned in the 2001 federal election under the slogan ‘We will decide who comes to this country and under what circumstances’ (Marr and Wilkinson [2003](#): 277). As this demonstrates, there is arguably no greater control than determining who is a ‘legitimate’ citizen of the state – that is, determining who can and cannot live within your borders. Being able to secure borders and identify when they are being breached is essential to state sovereignty. Consider how Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban recently called Syrian refugees attempting to enter his country ‘a poison’ that his country ‘won’t swallow’. Orban went on to describe refugees as migrants that the country did not want or need, because ‘every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk’ (*The Guardian* [2016](#)). The determination of whether an individual’s crossing of a border is illegal, whether they are

crossing as a migrant or a refugee, is part of how a state constructs its identity and territoriality. This chapter will therefore look first at how states define an individual's entry, through tracing the development of the term 'refugee', contrasting it with the term 'migrant' and exploring how this delineation affects the lives of people seeking entry into states.

## **Controlling migration: A brief history**

Even before the creation of the 'modern state' (see [Chapter 9](#)), there were attempts to 'territorialise' borders in order to control who could and could not enter and exit political communities. Evidence of early migration policy exists in China's political history from at least the second millennium BCE. From then until 800 CE, planned migration was a constant feature of Chinese population movement. What has changed with the advent of modern states is how they have responded to foreigners entering sovereign territory.

In the new world of nation-states, individuals needed to be 'territorialised'. Since the seventeenth century, many terms have been used by states in an attempt to distinguish new entrants from residents – foreigner, exile, alien, refugee, migrant. In more recent times, the tendency to classify people has become a central feature of the bureaucratic state and reflects the concern of bureaucrats to attach people to domiciles where 'they can be registered, enumerated, taxed, drafted and watched' (Tilly [1978](#): 49).

Today, a migrant is defined as a person who chooses to move from their country of origin to another, which will accept them (see [Box 33.1](#)). The causes of migration are important because the term 'migrant' is associated with choice – a choice that the person makes to seek a life elsewhere and a choice by the state to accept that person. When new states such as Canada, Australia and the United

States were being industrialised and urbanised, migrants were a welcome addition – though some were considered more preferable than others, as is still the case today. For instance, the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada all had Alien Laws in the 1800s and early 1900s, which prohibited ‘undesirables’ such as Asians and Jews from entering their state. The first Act passed by the new Australian federal government was the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, better known as the ‘White Australia Policy’. These policies were reflective of most new industrialising states’ dual tension – while they needed migrants for labour, they were fearful of taking on groups deemed to be ‘inassimilable’. This would lead to practices, such as in the United States and Australia, where there were annual quotas on, for example, the number of Asians who could enter per year, as well as language and health tests (which allowed migrant officials to randomly apply them to those who were, by appearance, deemed undesirable). Nonetheless, the idea of choice when thinking about migration is very important – the premise here is that you have a will to leave your country of origin with the knowledge that the receiving state will accept you.

### **Box 33.1: Terminology**

#### **Migrants and refugees**

- A *migrant* is a person who leaves their state by choice, and who the receiving state accepts by choice.
- A *forced migrant* is a person who did not leave their country by choice, but nor are they eligible for refugee status under the 1951 Convention (see [Box 33.2](#)).

- An *illegal migrant* is a migrant who enters another state without first seeking permission to do so, and who will often remain in the host state without a visa that allows them to stay or work there.
- A *refugee* is often forced to flee and to enter a state without its permission, and is not always welcomed in the state in which they seek refuge.

By contrast, the term ‘refugee’ has no association with choice. It is a relatively new term, first arriving in English usage at the end of the seventeenth century. Originally referring in French to someone searching for refuge and assistance, the term ‘refugee’ came to be associated with people fleeing some form of persecution. When it first came into English usage, it was used to describe the Protestant Huguenots who fled Catholic France in the seventeenth century, fearing persecution because of their refusal to convert to Catholicism. The Netherlands and England, the primary receiving states of the Huguenot population, were not resistant to accepting the Huguenot population because a large proportion of them were wealthy, aligned with aristocracy (which particularly suited England’s form of state rule), of similar religion and, in some cases, skilled.

Conversely, though, if the population had been poor, uneducated and without social or religious links to their host country, there arguably would not have been such acceptance, and it is this lack of guaranteed state reception, alongside the forced nature of flight, that distinguishes the refugee from the migrant in the modern state. Although the term ‘refugee’ is associated with fleeing and a lack of choice, it is also associated with an imposition upon the

receiving state. The state has little choice to accept or refuse because the refugee has nowhere else to go. This was never more marked than after the Russian Revolution of 1917 and at the end of World War I, when approximately 20 million refugees existed in Europe and could not, due to changes in state identities, borders and citizenship, return to where they originally lived. This left Western European countries with large numbers of displaced people that newly emerging states did not want because of this group's potential burden on attempts to rebuild infrastructure, distribute housing and provide employment and social welfare for their own population. Today, the world faces a similar situation with the highest ever number of recorded refugees who have fled situations that remain too dangerous for them to return. The responsibility of hosting the largest ever recorded refugee population has largely fallen on the neighbouring states who continue to receive populations who have fled across their borders seeking refuge from persecution and attack (UNHCR [2016a](#)).

## **The origins and purposes of refugee law**

### **Origins**

Contemporary international refugee law has its origins in the inter-war period between the First and Second World Wars (see [Chapter 9](#)). In 1921, the League of Nations was enlisted to assist with the resettlement of post-war refugees, principally Russians and Armenians. At the end of the Second World War, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was created under the UN umbrella to deal with the 40 million refugees across Europe. A crucial part of guaranteeing resettlement places (see [Box 33.2](#)) for these refugees was the creation of criteria that could be used to define who was eligible for such assistance and who was not, so that not just 'anyone' could be

given refugee status, along with all the legal and economic benefits that came with such status.

### **Box 33.2: Terminology**

#### **Definitions of a refugee according to international law**

*Resettlement* is the relocation of a refugee from a refugee camp to another state that will accept them and provide them with the same rights and benefits as a citizen.

The 1951 Convention (Article 1A) defines a refugee as a person who: owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

The 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees was an addendum to the 1951 Convention, which removed the time (prior to 1 January 1951) and geographic constraints (in Europe) from Article 1 of the 1951 Convention. This meant that a state could sign the 1967 Protocol and still follow all the remaining articles in the 1951 Convention, but without any limitations to its applicability.

The UN General Assembly agreed that it would be a fear of political persecution that would determine whether or not a person was a refugee. This definition had its origins in the work of the League of Nations Office for Refugees from 1926 to 1939. By the time UN member states had to vote on what the definition of a refugee would be in 1951, the association of persecution with

politics became the only legitimate understanding of what makes someone a refugee. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter referred to as the 1951 Convention, see [Box 33.3](#)) was created by the fifty-five states that were members of the Third Committee of the United Nations. The 1951 Convention was created as a legal guideline for states to use. Each Article within the Convention contributes to the process of refugee determination – including the definition of a refugee, how a refugee should be treated when first seeking asylum on a foreign border, the right not to be returned to their country of origin once determined as a refugee (non-refoulement), and what rights and benefits a refugee should receive from their host state – that is, recognition of marriage, intellectual property, employment and so on. What was most important about this Convention was that it determined who a refugee was – and legitimised states’ action to refuse asylum to those who could not lay claim to such status.

### **Box 33.3: Key texts**

#### **Important articles in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees**

##### **Article 31**

The host state is not to impose penalties on refugees for their illegal entry or presence when they come directly from a country where their life or freedom was threatened, provided they present themselves to authorities without delay. Nor should their movement be restricted for an undue length of time.

##### **Article 33**

Refugees bear the right not to be forcibly returned or expelled to a situation which would threaten one's life or freedom. This is the principle of *non-refoulement*.

#### **Article 34**

The host state should, upon conferment of refugee status, begin procedures to naturalise the refugee and provide citizenship rights.

When the 1951 Convention was created, the only people who could receive the status of a refugee were those affected by events in Europe prior to 1 January 1951. States had the option to apply the definition of a refugee to those outside Europe, but it could be only due to events prior to 1 January 1951. It is also important to bear in mind that the 1951 Convention was created at the beginning of the Cold War. The United States and France argued that the spread of communism across Eastern Europe was a growing cause for the flow of refugees into Western Europe, and that refuge for this group should be the primary focus for resettlement, for they were fleeing the worst kind of political persecution: communism. Thus the political overtones associated with refugee status were apparent, and the 1951 Convention was often used during the Cold War as an instrument by Western states against communism, which would publicly demonstrate their support to refugees who fled communism. However, the time and geographic constraints were removed by the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967 Protocol), which meant that signatory states had to process refugees irrespective of which country or region they had fled (see [Box 33.2](#)).

## **Purposes**

Contemporary international refugee law has two primary purposes (also see Goodwin-Gill [2016](#)). The first is to provide individuals with a right to enter a sovereign territory without permission. In the 1951 Convention, Article 31 stipulates that a person once deemed to be a refugee is neither to be penalised nor detained for entering the host country without permission, and must be provided with legal protection by the host state. This means that a person cannot be an illegal immigrant if found to be a refugee, and that if a signatory to the Convention, the state is required to determine the person's status first so that refugees are not wrongly punished. Further contained within the 1951 Convention is 'recognition of refugee status' procedures that permit states to identify whether the entrant has a legitimate claim to refugee status that should protect the individual from punishment for arriving illicitly. Once the refugee's claim is processed as legitimate, they are provided with further rights – such as the right to not be returned to their country of origin, as stated under Article 33 of the 1951 Convention.

The second purpose of refugee law is to provide the state with process for exclusion. Unlike a migrant, a refugee is meant to be able to enter any country without fear of return or penalisation. States wanted to be able to make sure that the person was 'worthy' of these rights; they did not want their state to be encumbered by people who just wanted to make a better life for themselves without the fuss of going through the migration application processes, or by people who could be criminals or security threats masquerading as refugees. However, due to its emphasis on political persecution, the definition of a refugee reflects a very narrow conception of what causes someone to flee and seek protection from another state. In practice, it is very difficult for an individual to prove a genuine fear of political persecution. The times when refugee status has been granted to a 'mass' group of refugees, such as an ethnic population or a

group with defined political affiliation, have been very rare. A recent example of a *group* that has been afforded refugee status is the populations fleeing the Syrian civil war. The Syrian refugee population has been the largest refugee population in the world, steadily rising since 2012 (UNHCR [2016a](#): 6). There are millions of Syrian refugees living in refugee camps along the border between Syria and neighbouring countries: Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran and Turkey; there are refugee populations in these same countries who have been directed to urban areas to live to relieve the pressure on the camps. Many of those in the Syrian refugee population have not been formally processed as refugees by host states, but the UNHCR recognises the population fleeing Syria as refugees and host states have provided temporary protection (UNHCR [2016a](#): 14). In such instances, recognition of the refugee status of a group has come from a UN General Assembly resolution permitting the UNHCR to grant mass refugee status to this particular group. Prior to the Syrian population, other examples have been the Hungarian population fleeing a communist crackdown on the state in 1954, and Indochinese refugees fleeing communist repression from 1979 to 1989.

## **The distribution of refugees around the world**

The global distribution of refugees exemplifies the dilemma that the world currently faces with the movement of people. The UNHCR 2015 Global Trends reported that at the end of 2015, 65.3 million people were displaced – this is four times the number of displacement a decade ago (UNHCR [2016a](#): 2). Between 2014 and 2015, over five million were displaced in the space of a year. Every minute, 24 people are being forced to leave their homes, and the majority of the total displaced population are women and children (UNHCR [2016a](#): 31, 52).

Displaced persons who flee their homes take a very dangerous journey of crossing international borders to then survive in cramped and exposed camps. Once they arrive in these camps, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to gender-based discrimination as well as exclusion from decision-making processes; 51 per cent of today's total refugee population are children (under age of 18) (Argentine Government [2014](#); UNHCR [2016a](#)).

Providing temporary protection for large refugee populations is disproportionate between wealthier countries and those that are less developed. Currently, 86 per cent of all refugees are being provided refuge in low and middle-income countries (UNHCR [2016a](#): 18). Turkey hosts the highest refugee population, and Lebanon hosts the highest refugee population per capita.

In addition to the increased refugee population and rising number of displaced persons, there is an increase in the number of people unable to return to their home countries. For a decade prior to the Syrian conflict, Afghan and Somali refugees were the highest refugee populations in the world – their respective conflicts are over 20 years old. Today the Syrian refugee population is estimated at 4.9 million, Afghanistan at 2.7 million and Somalia at 1.1 million. Colombia (at the end of a thirty-year civil war) and Syria have the largest number of internally displaced persons at 6.9 million and 6.6 million respectively (internally displaced persons are people who have had to flee their homes but are unable to flee the country). Iraq (invaded in 2003 and facing periods of civil war since) had the third highest number of internally displaced at 4.4. million (UNHCR [2016a](#): 3, 26). Voluntary repatriation for refugees who agree to return home has become the dominant practice for handling refugee populations. People are held in refugee camps or given temporary protection visas, then returned home once the war has ended or the regime commits to not persecuting the individuals in question. But this option is becoming less viable, with protracted situations making return impossible for many refugees fleeing

situations such as Syria (fifth year of civil war), Afghanistan (ongoing incursions in key resettlement territories) and Iraq (still experiencing large battles against terrorist groups such as [Islamic State \(IS\)](#)). As such, the UNHCR is attempting to move away from only directing refugees to camps and instead trying to introduce alternative opportunities for families to have financial independence, an opportunity to earn a livelihood and a degree of safety and comfort until they are able to return home (UNHCR [2016b](#)).

However, as long as people continue to be displaced by war, there is a need to provide them with protection and shelter. In 2015, there were 63.5 million people not living in their own country or their home. The main reason for this massive jump has been a mass exodus of refugees from the civil war in Syria (2011– ), with refugees fleeing aerial bombing, military incursions and embargoed humanitarian access (UNHCR [2016a](#): 6). In such a situation, it is physically and logistically impossible to individually assess who does and does not meet the narrow definition of a refugee before permitting them to cross a border – often these people have travelled on long, dangerous journeys (often by foot), sometimes with children or elderly to care for, and with all their possessions on their backs. Unsurprisingly, many of these people seek to rest and stop in the country next to the one from which they fled. This situation contributes to three main reasons why the refugee population is unable to be more adequately balanced across low-, middle-and upper-income countries: the definition of a refugee and their relationship to resettlement; the location of flight and refuge, which is geographically determined; and the changes to resettlement schemes by industrialised countries.

As stated earlier, the refugee definition focuses on persecution, but it is a term provided to large groups fleeing violent and unstable situations. This definition may supply access to refugee camp and a UNHCR refugee ID card, but it may not guarantee exit out of the camp and into a resettlement country.

Resettlement countries prioritise individuals most at risk of persecution if they ever return to their country of origin, versus those who have a generalised fear of return. If an individual is fleeing because of a lack of medical services or dire economic circumstances – that is, because a type of treatment is unavailable, or because they face malnutrition and even starvation – these conditions are not just cause for flight under the 1951 Convention. Likewise, forced uprooting due to natural disasters does not fall under the 1951 Convention definition. What this means is that, even if a person is able to seek asylum in a state that is a member of the 1951 Convention, refugee status will not be granted because of a generalised fear of violence, authoritarian rule, poverty, famine, natural disaster or failed medical care. Of course, people still flee due to all of these conditions, but it does not guarantee the individual or their family an offer of resettlement. In 2015, less than 2 per cent of the world's refugee population were offered the chance to resettle in a new country with all the rights that come with resettlement – option for citizenship, language classes, access to family reunion, shelter, access to education and health care services. People left waiting in camps are then faced with two choices: return to their home country when safe to do so with assistance from migration organisations such as UNHCR or the International Organization of Migration (IOM); or stay in their asylum state and attempt to locally integrate. Here the UNHCR is trialling a number of new initiatives, from urban resettlement and cash-based interventions to supporting people to make their own choices and live outside camps if they wish (UNHCR [2016b](#)). Of course, these programs have to be carefully managed with the host state and ensure their permission. If alternatives are not found, camps can become situations of protracted displacement – where populations are not welcome to settle outside the camp in the asylum state and they are not permitted access to land, jobs or social services. These situations can give rise to second, and even third, generations being born in refugee camps.

A second reason for the high concentration of refugees in developing countries is the legacy of political instability in particular regions, which remain least developed and are often surrounded by least-developed countries. Much work has been done in development studies about how the era of decolonisation from the early 1950s through to the late 1960s left many Third World states with very little state capacity. Challenges to authoritarian rule, and regional conflicts over land, resources and political control, resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of people seeking refuge in the 1970s and 1980s in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and South America. The legacy of these conflicts continued into the 1990s and the refugee population increased during this decade, driven by events in Eastern Europe with the end of the Soviet Union and the break-up of many Soviet-ruled states in the 1990s, followed by the mass atrocities being committed in the former Yugoslavia. At the same time in Central Africa, long and bloody conflicts within and between seven countries from 1996–2002 (Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, Sudan, Angola and Zimbabwe) produced millions of refugees, who often had to relocate from one border to the next to seek refuge.

In the last decade, there has been continued instability in already long-standing refugee-producing countries such as Afghanistan, which was amplified with the US-led invasion in 2001, and Iraq, which since the US-led invasion in 2003 has experienced episodes of extreme violence that have led to millions of people being displaced. While conflicts in Colombia, Somalia and Sri Lanka appear to be entering phases of stability, atrocities continue to be committed elsewhere and contribute to refugee flows from South Sudan, Myanmar, the Central African Republic and Syria.

The flow of refugees across borders, as has occurred in post-Soviet Europe, Central and East Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, brings us to a related point of difference between developing and developed states: geography. A vast

majority of high-income states have either ‘buffer’ states between themselves and the countries from which refugees flee, or are completely isolated from other states by water. Western Europe has, since the end of the Cold War, obligated Eastern European states wishing to join the European Union to sign on to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. Eastern European countries (i.e. Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria) have become the first European Union countries that a vast number of refugees enter when transiting via Turkey into the European Union; and under EU processes they must first be processed in these countries. It is the same situation for Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Greece, which have had to manage the vast number of refugees fleeing North Africa and the Middle East (primarily Syria and Iraq) in recent years. However, the pressure on these countries in recent years has also led to efforts to develop more equitable burden-sharing arrangements within the European Union. Germany, in particular, has been noted for its generous resettlement schemes to refugees who have arrived in Europe since 2015 (UNHCR [2016a](#): 35).

The United States and Canada are to some degree also protected by their geographic land mass, although the United States has experienced asylum seekers entering by land (primarily from South America) and both countries have experienced ‘unauthorised’ boat arrivals of asylum seekers despite the dangerous and difficult passage for these individuals. Because of the danger involved, such arrivals are rare and often viewed from international waters, which gives authorities time to prepare and intercept the boat(s). The same may be said of the United Kingdom – its physical isolation protects it from unannounced arrivals of people en masse. Australia also can ensure with relative ease that no refugees surreptitiously pass a rocky border region or thickly covered forest area that is the only demarcation of a border, because entering by sea or air is the only way to enter Australia. Entering by tourist visa or a working visa and then claiming asylum at the airport, or illegally overstaying visa

conditions, are the most common ways by which people seek entry into developed countries. But this too can be difficult: governments invest a lot of money in customs and immigration agencies to screen and catch those who enter and then stay on as ‘illegal migrants’. In contrast, a large number of territories in the Middle East, South America and Sub-Saharan Africa (and to a lesser extent Asia) are not physically separated. People can walk, drive, row or swim across sovereign borders to seek refuge, and this makes it physically difficult (without resorting to violence) to stop thousands coming across a border.

Finally, the options available to forcibly displaced people have significantly changed in funding and emphasis since the Cold War years. The ideological battle of the Cold War made those seeking asylum from communist states attractive propaganda to the United States and others to demonstrate the triumph of capitalism and democratic governance (though it should be noted that refugees from Africa and South Asia during this period had high numbers but fewer offers of resettlement). Cycles of economic downturn in major Western states during the 1980s, and then during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008, have seen voter pressure and backlash on the offers of resettlement from developed states in countries such as Canada, France, the United States and the United Kingdom. But others have also pointed to racism and fear generating these types of ‘pushback’ responses to refugees (Gerard [2013](#)). Australia, for example, has had no economic downturn for over twenty years, and one of the harshest asylum policies regarding people who enter without prior permission to claim refugee status.

Developed countries counter-argue that they provide valuable benefits to the international refugee regime: annual resettlement schemes, donor aid income to UNHCR and local humanitarian organisations to support refugee settlement ‘solutions’ that focus on local settlement (i.e. supporting ‘regional solutions’

where neighbouring states resettle the refugee populations), and voluntary repatriation (Slaughter and Crisp [2009](#)).

Three conditions that affect and influence the refugee protection regime demonstrate how asylum may not eliminate economic and social fragility. There may be further hardship on arrival, but while it remains unsafe to return home, the current focus and attention is on how to advance temporary protection measures in the host state, how to provide local integration opportunities and remove restrictions on leaving camps, and how to work and study without a residency permit. Even a 50 per cent boost to resettlement offers would still leave 37 million people where they currently reside. Clearly, alternatives to over-populated refugee camps will become essential for many refugees.

## **The present situation**

There has been much debate about the best way to resolve the global imbalance in the refugee intake and resettlement numbers (for example, Betts [2013](#); Goodwin-Gill [2016](#)). The problem of how to develop an international solution that addresses this imbalance has led to debate largely centring on three concerns: definition of persecution; protracted refugee situations; and Western states adopting their share of the ‘refugee burden’.

First, there is the matter of broadening what ‘persecution’ means under the refugee definition. Recent debate has centred largely on whether the emphasis on ‘political persecution’ reflects the real conditions that force the majority of people to flee their homes. As discussed above, people are forced to flee for a wide range of reasons in addition to political persecution, which include: economic deprivation; natural disaster (numbers are predicted to rise with the impact of climate change); state failure to offer protection against domestic and

interpersonal violence; attacks from organised crime gangs; or lack of access to essential medicines. Why should those fleeing these life-threatening conditions not be afforded the same protections as those fearing political persecution (Betts [2010](#); Cohen [2007](#))? The debate has been divided between those who seek complementary protection and those who argue that any effort to broaden the definition would be detrimental to the refugee protection regime (McAdam [2007](#)). Those in favour of broadening the justifications for people to seek asylum argue that Western states in particular should introduce a complementary protection regime that accepts people fleeing any cause of deprivation and insecurity. A form of protection that is complementary to the protection available for refugees under the 1951 Convention is essential, it is argued, because the new drivers of forced migration are no less valid reasons for people to flee than the narrow conditions outlined in the Convention more than sixty years ago (Betts [2010](#): 363). Opponents of this call for complementary protection have articulated two concerns. First, if the conditions under which persecution and protection can be claimed are broadened, states may not be more generous, but less so. Price ([2009](#): 250–1) goes so far as to argue that every time a (Western) Commonwealth court interprets the 1951 Convention to apply to a ‘new form’ of persecution, the state imposes more restrictive legislative and regulatory conditions upon those seeking asylum. The second argument against broadening the refugee definition is that asylum is a rare protection afforded those facing a threat to their bodily integrity or liberty due to expulsion from their political community as ‘enemies of the state’. Their choice, if it can be called that, is to leave or die. Those facing extreme economic, medical and environment deprivation are often not enemies of the state, yet the state has not protected them from an equivalent fate. Who should protect them, for how long and under what legal status thus remain contested questions.

Second, the protracted refugee situation has also attracted controversy. Do people stay in refugee camps because their livelihood may be better there compared with their country of origin? For some, their first experience of access to education and healthcare may be in a refugee camp managed by humanitarian agencies. Returning to a fragile state with no such resources would be daunting and difficult. However, it must be remembered that people primarily remain in camps because it is not safe for them to return home. Refugee camps are difficult places for people who are disabled as well as for the family members who care for disabled members of their family – accessing toilets, showers and food deliveries are new burdens to manage. Camps are dangerous places for women and girls. As a report to the 2014 UN Security Council Open Debate outlined:

Even though each refugee and IDP situation is unique, displacement and statelessness exacerbate existing gender inequalities, amplifying the discrimination and hardship [already] faced by women and girls. Through a combination of factors, including gender-based discrimination in access to resources, education and employment, poor reproductive health care and exclusion from decision-making processes, refugee and IDP women constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in the world.

(Argentina Government [2014](#))

Second-and even third-generation refugees live in refugee camps such as Dadaab refugee camp on the Kenya–Somalia border (Hussein [2016](#)), the camps on the Afghan–Pakistan border and the non-government controlled area camps on the Thai–Myanmar border (Human Rights Watch [2012](#)). The prospect of resettlement has long been abandoned for many who live there. Vulnerability is always present, with raids on camps and attempts by the host government to close them. The uncertain and unsafe conditions in the home country are feared, so many will endure long-term protracted situations of displacement and extreme vulnerability. For the displaced within their country, their opportunities further

constrained – often they are not at liberty to safely relocate themselves or to return home, such as the Rohingya population in the Rakhine state of Myanmar (Solomon [2016](#)).

Even if we presume all of the populations discussed above desired permanent resettlement, only 2 per cent of the total population who fall under the remit of the UNHCR responsibility are provided with resettlement places. There has been a rise in resettlement offers, with 33 countries currently providing resettlement quotas for UNHCR-recognised refugees (UNHCR [2016a](#): 25–6), but these can be ad hoc from year to year. The current increase is mostly attributable to the increase in the number of countries (up from 27) willing to provide resettlement places for Syrians at greatest risk of persecution – 30 000 places by end of 2014 – with a projected move to 100 000 places by the end of 2016. But even for the Syrian population, this is just over 2 per cent of the population being offered resettlement away from that crisis.

Finally, as people continue to leave their place of origin to seek asylum elsewhere, reception is never the same (Haddad [2008](#)). Resettlement states are constantly devising new policies and legislation to deter the arrival of asylum seekers. Australia, for example, has had multiple changes to its legislation during successive governments over the last two decades: from excising territory, placing restrictions on who can apply for refugee status depending on their mode of arrival and readjusting refugee resettlement intake. (This is the most positive development with the country projected to increase intake from 12 000–13 000 to 18 750 by 2018–19.) What has been distinctive about the Australian case over this period has been the preoccupation with a threat-focused (rather than protection-focused) engagement with those who seek asylum by arriving on Australian shores by boat. However, for those who remain in refugee camps, Australia has a rather generous and continuous annual refugee intake resettlement scheme (20 000 may not be generous, given the volume of refugees,

but it is generous for a country of its per capita population and Australia's resettlement scheme has long been established with UNHCR).

In reply to criticism of refugee policy, resettlement states such as Australia have pointed to their aid efforts, which seek to invest in the political and economic conditions that prevent people from leaving. Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has a sizeable humanitarian assistance budget to assist asylum seekers in the Middle East (particularly Iraq and Syria), refugees in transit (primarily Indonesia) and those requiring protection in their home country (Sri Lanka and Myanmar). Funding people to stay is controversial, but so is providing temporary protection resettlements – cash contributions to people to temporarily reside in safety until they are able to return home (Haddad [2008](#): 207–8). However, with 63.5 million people displaced and no dramatic rise in resettlement offers, the introduction of these sorts of measures that protect people from harm will be needed to avoid asylum seekers seeking illegal voyages and high cost people-smuggling operations to escape danger and uncertainty (Border Crossing Observatory [2016](#)).

Ultimately, international refugee law provides the scope to protect populations fleeing dangerous situations, but states have the option of deciding how to implement these laws. In addition to the will to protect refugee populations, there is a need to create alternative protection responses (Betts [2010](#): 361).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that the development of refugee policy at the international level has sought specifically to differentiate between a migrant and a refugee, with the implicit idea that the term 'refugee' is a special status granted

to few due to exceptional circumstances. However, as this chapter has also shown through highlighting the shared burden of the refugee population between the developing and developed world, the number seeking refuge still remains high, and the need for equitable sharing of the burden among states is great. The imbalance between developing states and developed states does affect refugees and the choices they make in seeking asylum. The fact that 80 per cent of the world's refugee population remains in mostly cramped, unsafe conditions in the developing world indicates why people seek other desperate means to seize a chance for a better life.

## **Discussion questions**

**33.1** What is the difference between a migrant and a refugee?

**33.2** Should the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees have a broader definition of 'refugee' in Article 1A?

**33.3** Who is responsible to protect refugee populations?

**33.4** Does it seem safer to be an internally displaced person?

**33.5** Does your country have a yearly refugee intake scheme? Why/why not? If your country does, from where do the majority of refugees your country accepts come from? Why would your country receive high numbers of this refugee population?

## *Further reading*

Betts, Alexander 2013, *Survival migration: Failed governance and the crisis of displacement*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. *Confronts the failure of the*

*current international refugee protection regime to protect large numbers of people fleeing political persecution, but also deprivation, climate change and violence. Argues for protection categories to be redefined to accommodate solutions for these vulnerable populations.*

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Gibney, Matthew J. 2004, *The ethics and politics of asylum: Liberal democracy and the response to refugees*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An important theoretically informed account of how liberal democratic states (Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States) deal with refugees.*

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Haddad, Emma 2008, *The refugee in international society: Between sovereigns*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Argues that the evolution of the 'refugee problem' is directly related to the creation of the modern state, and will remain an 'inevitable' product of the modern state. Once this reality is accepted, new responses and solutions will become available.*

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Orchard, Phil 2014, *A right to flee: Refugees, states, and the construction of international cooperation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Examines the changing ways in which states and other actors define and shape refugee protection, especially in a context of ongoing crisis.*

# Global environmental politics



**Robyn Eckersley**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter will delineate the field of global environmental politics, and track the emergence and rapid acceleration of global environmental problems since the end of World War II. It will also introduce the key global environmental discourses of limits to growth, sustainable development, ecological security, environmental justice and the concept of planetary boundaries, together with the proposed new geological epoch called ‘the Anthropocene’. It will then explore

how environmental scholars working in the major theoretical traditions of International Relations (IR) – realism, liberalism and critical theory – have approached and responded to a fundamental puzzle of global environmental politics: why is it that, despite a rapid increase in public environmental concern and environmental legislation and environmental treaties at the national and international levels, the most serious and irreversible global environmental problems facing the international community have continued to worsen? Finally, the chapter turns to contemporary challenges, focusing on the shifting role of the United States in tackling the most serious global environmental problem of all: climate change.

The study of global environmental politics has emerged as a problem-oriented and multidisciplinary field of inquiry that seeks to understand: (1) how and why global ecological problems arise and persist; (2) how ecological risks are distributed through space and time; and (3) how the global community (encompassing [states](#) and [non-state actors](#)) has responded, or ought to respond. These three basic questions frame the field of inquiry of global environmental politics. They also signal the enormous political challenges facing international and transnational collective efforts to protect the earth's ecosystems and climate in a world of nearly 200 [sovereign states](#) with vast disparities in capacity, resource endowments, population, cultures and levels of economic development.

Global environmental politics is a sprawling field of study in terms of both the sheer breadth of the object of study and the variety of disciplinary frames that are relevant to global ecopolitical problems. While the primary object of study is political responses to global and trans-boundary environmental problems, the distinction between global and trans-boundary, and national and local, environmental problems is hard to maintain. All global ecological problems produce different local effects, and many local and transnational practices contribute to global ecological problems. For example, local practices

of land clearing contribute to deforestation and species extinction at the local level, but these local problems are globally ubiquitous, and tied into [international systems](#) of investment, production and trade. The term ‘global’ in global environmental politics therefore encompasses all those domestic and trans-border practices that are implicated in the both the generation and governance of environmental problems, along with the global and transnational discourses that frame our understanding of these problems. This encompasses not only international relations between states, but also transnational relations between state and non-state actors, ranging from scientists and [transnational corporations](#) to international organisations and environmental [non-governmental organisations \(NGOs\)](#).

Given the sheer breadth of the field, it is not surprising that it includes scholars working within a variety of research traditions in the [discipline](#) of IR as well as the broader field of [globalisation](#) and development studies (see [Box 34.1](#)). This has produced a variety of strikingly different theories of global environmental politics, ranging from explanatory to [normative](#) and conservative to radical. At the same time, several prominent global environmental discourses have emerged in both the practice and study of global environmental politics that cut across sub-disciplinary boundaries, anchor general debates and inform political proposals for institutional reform.

#### **Box 34.1: Key texts**

##### **Where can I find published research on global environmental politics?**

Academic journals covering debates in global environmental politics include *Environmental Politics*; *Global Environmental Politics*; *Global Environmental Change*; *Climate Policy*; *Environment and Planning A, B*

and C; *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*; *WIREs Climate Change* and *The Journal of Environment and Development*. Systematic reporting of global environmental trends can be found in the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme's (IGBP [2015](#)) research on the Great Acceleration and the concept of 'planetary boundaries'. Jared Scott's documentary *The Age of Consequences* (Scott [2016](#)) provides important insights into how the US military has responded to the threat of climate change, while the Center for Climate and Security (<https://climateandsecurity.org>) provides up-to-date resources on the climate and security nexus, including articles, reports and briefing papers.

## **The rise of the environment as a global political problem**

The global ecological crisis – marked by an exponential increase in the range, scale and seriousness of environmental problems around the world – is generally understood to have emerged only in the second half of the twentieth century, although its beginnings may be traced to the processes of modernisation and globalisation that followed European global expansion and the Industrial Revolution. The first nuclear test in 1945 introduced the idea of global ecological risks with the prospect of a 'nuclear holocaust', while the long period of economic boom following the end of World War II produced a range of mass-produced goods but also a mass of globally ubiquitous ecological problems. Rapid world economic growth, the proliferation of new technologies and rising population levels in the post-World War II period generated increasing energy

and resource consumption, new sources and rising levels of pollution and waste production, and the rapid erosion of the earth's biodiversity.

The discovery of the 'hole' in the ozone layer and the problem of global warming in the 1980s provided a new litany of global problems, while the new millennium saw the increasing acidification of the world's oceans and the prospects of the biggest wave of species extinction since the dinosaurs walked the earth 65 million years ago. All of these problems are effects of what has been described as 'the Great Acceleration' in human activity that began with the industrial revolution and rapidly quickened in the post-World War II era (IGBP [2015](#)). Indeed, by the turn of the millennium, earth systems scientists had proposed a new geological epoch called the [Anthropocene](#) to mark the fact that humans have become the dominant geological force shaping earth systems processes (Crutzen and Stoemer [2000](#); Steffen et al. [2015](#)). Whereas the 11 000-year-old Holocene epoch was conducive to the flourishing of human civilisation, the changes underway in the proposed Anthropocene hold out the prospect of unpredictable, harmful, irreversible and possibly abrupt tipping points in earth system processes that threaten to undermine human civilisation. Earth systems scientists have identified nine 'planetary boundaries' within which human societies must operate to avoid such harmful and irreversible environmental change, and they have argued that four such boundaries have already been transgressed: climate change; biodiversity loss and species extinction; land-system change; and altered biogeochemical cycles, such as the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles (Steffen et al. [2015](#)).

## **Key discourses**

### **From limits to growth to sustainable development**

The discovery of ‘planetary boundaries’ represents the latest attempt by the scientific community to track, frame and politicise global environmental change. The first attempts began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the so-called ‘limits to growth’ debate, which publicised the uncanny correlation between the escalating rates of global economic growth and environmental degradation. Influential publications such as the Club of Rome’s *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. [1972](#)) offered dire predictions of impending ecological catastrophe. This period also saw the consolidation of the modern environment movement as a persistent and ubiquitous social movement and the enactment of a raft of new environmental legislation in many OECD countries. The first [UN](#) Conference on the Human Environment, held in 1972, led to the creation of the first official UN environmental organ – the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

However, the general message of the limits to growth advocates – that environmental protection required drastic measures, including the curbing of economic growth and human population – attracted a critical backlash from technological optimists and proved to be unpalatable to political leaders. In any event, the discourse of limits to growth was soon overshadowed by the new discourse of ‘sustainable development’ following the publication in 1987 of *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), otherwise known as the Brundtland Report (WCED [1987](#)). The WCED, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, was set up in 1983 by the UN General Assembly to take stock of global ecological problems and develop a global agenda for change. After reviewing global environmental trends, the WCED called on the international community to adopt a new path of sustainable development that would meet the needs of present generations without sacrificing the needs of future generations. Instead of seeking to limit economic growth, the WCED argued that sustainable development merely required the

‘decoupling’ of economic growth and environmental protection through constant technological innovation, which would reduce the amount of natural resources and energy consumed and waste produced per unit of gross domestic product (GDP). This has also served as the central claim of the more recent discourse of ‘ecological modernisation’, which argues that improving the environmental efficiency of production through technological innovation actually improves rather than retards national economic competitiveness. Indeed, a new and optimistic iteration of the ecological modernisation discourse argues that we humans have become ‘Earth makers’ who can, through our technological ingenuity, push back planetary boundaries to suit human purposes and, if necessary, colonise other planets (Mascaro [2015](#)).

However, unlike these advocates of technological ecological modernisation, the WCED called not only for technological innovation but also for intra-and inter-generational equity. The WCED observed that communities that are impoverished are often forced to utilise the environment in unsustainable ways, and that efforts should be made to enable the global South to ‘catch up’ with the global North. This argument highlights the paradoxical, and still deeply contested, relationship between economic growth and environmental quality: further growth increases societal capacity to respond to environmental degradation, but also increases environmental degradation. Increasing the environmental efficiency of each unit of production merely slows the rate of increase in environmental degradation, but does not reduce aggregate levels of such degradation. This is partly due to the so-called ‘rebound effect’, where improvements in the environmental efficiency of production lead to rising incomes, which then fuels increasing consumption and pollution.

Nonetheless, the WCED’s ‘win–win’ compromise was politically appealing and widely endorsed by governments, major environmental NGOs and business leaders. In the wake of the Brundtland Report, the ‘limits to growth’ idea that

economic growth and environmental protection stand in a simple, [zero-sum](#) relationship has now been replaced by the idea that it is possible, at least to some extent, to *integrate* environment and development goals. However, exactly how and how much remain matters of ongoing political debate.

The concept of sustainable development served as the organising theme of the second UN Conference on Environment and Development (the ‘Earth Summit’) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It also framed the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (the core principles of sustainable development) and Agenda 21 (the global action plan for sustainable development), and served as the meeting for the final negotiation and signing of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Sustainable development has remained the over-arching theme of subsequent environmental summits held in Johannesburg in 2002 and again in Rio de Janeiro for the Rio+20 summit in 2012. Moreover, the Millennium Development Goals have now been superseded by a new suite of Sustainable Development Goals 2015, which seek a more thoroughgoing integration of economic, social and environmental goals.

Since the Rio+20 summit in 2012, and in light of growing concern about the increasing likelihood of dangerous climate change, a new discourse of ‘green growth’ has emerged within organisations such as the OECD and the [World Bank](#), and a new Global Green Growth Institute has been established with its headquarters in Seoul. Green growth, via investment not only in green technologies but also in green infrastructure, is defended as the means for operationalising sustainable development, including decarbonisation. Yet it has struggled to be heard in national capitals. Moreover, as we shall see, critical political ecologists question whether environmental protection and capitalist growth – particularly in the latter’s neoliberal form – are compatible. They argue that capitalism is inherently unsustainable because it is inherently expansionary,

discounts the future, and privatises profits while ‘externalising’ the ecological costs of economic activity which are passed on to innocent third parties and future generations. On this view, strict environmental regulation of investment, production and consumption is defended as necessary to protect planetary boundaries and other life-support systems, as well as human health and well-being.

### **Ecological security**

The end of the Cold War temporarily eased one form of insecurity – the imminent risk of nuclear war between the [superpowers](#) – only to reveal new forms of ecological insecurity, such as dwindling supplies of fresh water, fisheries and arable soil, the accumulation of toxic and non-biodegradable waste, erosion of biodiversity and the serious threats of global warming. Instead of invading armies, citizens now contemplated new threats such as ‘invading’ deserts and oceans, ultraviolet radiation and malaria-carrying mosquitoes and other health risks, all of which challenge traditional notions and practices of territorial defence. Predicted sea-level rises and damage to coastal infrastructure from global warming are expected to threaten human security and trigger the biggest wave of forced migration in human history, which is likely to generate or exacerbate political friction within and between states. Some analysts have predicted that competition over the increasing scarcity of natural resources (such as timber, arable land and especially water) is likely to lead to resource nationalism and an increasing incidence of armed conflict within and between states. For example, the Arab Spring has been linked to droughts and unrest from spikes in food prices arising from climate change, while the violence in Syria has been linked to mass migration from drought-stricken regional areas to cities such as Aleppo (Werrell and Femia [2013](#)). Traditional strategic studies experts now

frame climate change as a ‘threat multiplier’. However, critics point out that purely environmental conflicts are rare, and are usually entangled with other conflicts and inequalities. Moreover, some environmental problems have generated new forms of trans-boundary cooperation, particularly in relation to watersheds that straddle traditional political boundaries.

Although the concept of ecological security has not enjoyed the same notoriety as the concept of sustainable development in the international environment and development debates, it has nonetheless reshaped the strategic thinking of many defence departments around the world, leading to national security strategies that give significant prominence to the multiple insecurities that will arise on a warming planet. As Jared Scott’s documentary, *The Age of Consequences* ([2016](#)), makes clear, the Pentagon has adopted a very long-term horizon in thinking about the risks of climate change which puts it at odds with the US Congress. Yet there are many who doubt the wisdom of employing the language of [security](#) in order to raise the status of ecological problems to a matter of ‘high politics’. Far from greening the state, the military and global governance, critics have suggested that the discourse of ecological security may unwittingly serve to reinforce a [Hobbesian](#) state system and legitimate the militarisation of state responses to environmental threats (Deudney [1990](#)).

However, proponents argue that if we adopt a human security or ecological security frame rather than a traditional national security frame, it will direct attention to complex international interdependencies and demand critical reflection on the sources, moral referents, responses and conditions for long-term human and environmental security. These broader security frames are seen to have the potential to transform narrow, [state-centred](#) security thinking, encourage greater international cooperation and possibly enable the partial redirection of military spending towards saving lives in response to climate-related emergencies.

## **Environmental justice**

The environmental justice movement has sought to expose the connections between inequality and social domination, and the degradation of the environment, which has produced a very skewed distribution of environmental impacts within and between nations.

Indeed, the uneven distribution of environmental ‘goods’ and ‘bads’ has emerged as a major source of political conflict between the global North and global South. In international environmental negotiations, developing countries have drawn attention to the huge disparity in per capita levels of resource and energy consumption and waste production between the rich world and poor world. UNEP’s Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, completed in March 2005, found that approximately 60 per cent of the ecosystem services that support life on earth are being degraded or used unsustainably (UNEP [2005](#)). It also found that the world’s poor are suffering a disproportionate share of the harmful effects of environmental degradation. This is particularly striking in relation to climate change, where low-income populations in developing countries – especially in tropical and sub-tropical regions and in low-lying islands and coastal areas – are the most vulnerable. Yet these communities are also the least responsible for generating emissions and the least capable of adapting to the harmful impacts of climate change that are already locked in. These concerns have been raised by developing countries from the very beginning of the climate negotiations of the UNFCCC, and they are reflected in the principles of equity and ‘common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities’ (hereafter CBDR) that are enshrined in the Rio Declaration, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 1992, the Kyoto Protocol 1997, the Copenhagen Accord 2009 and the Paris Agreement 2015. These principles acknowledge that the developed world should take the lead in tackling climate change because it has a greater responsibility for historical emissions, significantly higher per capita

emissions and a greater capacity to absorb emission cuts and adapt to climate change than developing countries. It also acknowledges the specific development needs and special circumstances of developing countries, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and least able to adapt. This also explains why, under the Kyoto Protocol, only industrialised countries are required to commit to mandatory greenhouse gas reduction targets in the first commitment period (2008–12). However, the Paris Agreement has abandoned the rigid distinction between industrialised and developing countries that is enshrined in the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, largely due to the rapid economic growth, rising middle class and increasing emissions of major developing countries such as China and India, whose participation is essential for an effective regime. Nonetheless, the expectation that developed countries will continue to lead in mitigation and also assist developing countries through the provision of climate finance and technology transfer has been carried forward since the Paris Agreement.

## **Theories of global environmental politics**

Given the sheer breadth of the field of global environmental politics, there is no single IR theory that is able to provide a comprehensive explanation of the fundamental puzzle posed at the beginning of this chapter: Why are the most serious and irreversible global environmental problems getting worse rather than better? Each IR theory shines a different torch on the problem and these torches vary in the width and critical intensity of their beams. Here we illustrate these differences through the case study of climate change.

### **Realism and neoliberal institutionalism**

Given their focus on the anarchic character of the international system, and the priority states must give to their own survival, [realists](#) argue that states have no incentive to take [multilateral](#) or [unilateral](#) action to protect the world's climate whenever this might put them at a relative disadvantage to other states (Grundig [2006](#)). Since taking domestic action to reduce emissions incurs up-front costs, and since the climate regime expects developed countries to assume a greater burden than developing countries, realists would expect to see a stand-off. The exception is when a [hegemonic](#) state or powerful [alliance](#) of major emitters regards climate protection as consonant with its self-interest and is prepared to absorb a major share of the costs of collective action. This explanation would appear to make sense of the withdrawal of the United States from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 on the grounds that it would harm the US economy and because developing countries were not required to take mitigation action. It would also appear to make sense of the Paris Agreement, given the unprecedented bilateral cooperation between the United States (under the Obama administration) and China in agreeing to take national action. Yet this account cannot explain why a vast majority of the world's states ratified the Kyoto Protocol, and why most developed states sought to implement their Kyoto obligations, despite the defection of the United States. Likewise, the parties to the Paris Agreement – especially China – have declared their resolve to continue to implement the agreement despite threats by the Trump administration to withdraw. Nor does it explain why most developed states accept their responsibility to lead in mitigation and to provide climate finance to developing countries. Clearly, a preoccupation with relative gains and losses has not prevented international cooperation or respect for climate justice norms, although it has certainly produced considerable contestation and has limited the extent of many parties' mitigation ambition under the regime. But we need a finer-grained theory to understand the circumstances when concern over relative gains becomes

politically dominant in the negotiating strategy of particular states, such as under the US administrations of George W. Bush and Donald Trump.

[Neoliberal](#) institutionalists share realism's basic assumption that states are self-seeking, rational egoists operating in an anarchic world, but they diverge significantly from realists in their assessment of the efficacy of the rule of [international law](#) and international institutions, and the importance of relative versus absolute gains. They have shown that states will cooperate and realise absolute gains under well-designed environmental treaties or 'regimes' in order to avoid the 'sub-optimal' consequences of international anarchy in situations of complex interdependence. In short, well-designed treaties are the solution to the problem of international anarchy when they can provide a better set of pay-offs than alternative self-help arrangements by lowering transaction costs, reducing uncertainty, providing mutual assurance and stabilising expectations. Concerns over relative gains and climate justice enter into consideration as part of the examination of the incentive structure of treaties, such as whether they provide an acceptable distribution of benefits and burdens for the contracting parties in terms of relative economic costs, relative environmental vulnerability and relative capacity to adjust to environmental problems (Dolšák [2001](#); Sprinz and Vaahutoranta [1994](#)). However, the broader normative debates about environmental justice and responsibility, or structural inequalities in the international political economy, are not part of the research agenda of neoliberal institutionalism, which is confined to explanation, prediction and problem-solving rather than fundamental critique.

### **From critical theory to global political ecology**

In contrast to the 'problem-solving' approach of neoliberal institutionalism, [critical theory](#) has explicitly set itself the task of drawing attention to structures

of social and economic domination, and highlighting and encouraging counter-hegemonic discourses and movements that seek to overcome such domination. Building on this broad tradition, a new school of International Relations (IR) [theory](#), variously referred to as ‘global political ecology’, ‘critical political ecology’ or ‘Third World political ecology’ emerged in the 1990s as a direct challenge to the environmental analyses and reformism of neoliberal institutionalists. Drawing primarily on [Gramscian](#) critical theory, but also Habermasian and post-structural traditions of critical theory as well as development studies and radical environmental scholarship in the social sciences and humanities, this new branch of international ecopolitical inquiry has identified global capitalism, and not just the system of sovereign states, as a primary culprit with regard to global environmental degradation, as well as the skewed distribution of ecological risks. From this perspective, global capitalism is shown to leave highly uneven patterns of development and impacts across different human communities and ecosystems, both within and between particular states, with some social classes and communities leaving much bigger ‘ecological footprints’ at the expense of others. Drawing on neo-dependency theory, some critical political ecologists have argued that the international economic division of labour between rich and poor countries has produced not only unequal economic exchanges, but also ‘unequal ecological exchanges’; this has resulted in a net ‘environmental load displacement’ from the North to the South (Hornborg [1998](#); Jorgenson and Clark [2009](#)). Whereas traditional international political economy had always focused on investment and production, global political ecology has highlighted uneven patterns of consumption, as well as global patterns of advertising, retailing and waste disposal in global commodity chains. It has also highlighted the [power](#) of consumer and environmental organisations to redirect patterns of investment and

production, such as consumer boycotts, green labelling programs and the movement to divest from fossil fuels.

More generally, global political ecology has highlighted the ways in which economic globalisation and the ascendancy of neoliberal economics have weakened both the steering capability and political legitimacy of states. Instead of serving as the protectors and providers of public goods and services (such as environmental quality), states increasingly are acting as facilitators of privatisation, commodification, marketisation and deregulation. At the same time, global political ecology has drawn attention to a range of new public, private and hybrid forms of governance that shape environmental policy at the local, regional and transnational levels. Examples include the corporate responsibility movement, new environmental management systems, transnational environmental policy networks, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which produces regular assessment reports that synthesise the latest research on climate science and environmental NGO product-certification schemes.

Finally, for global political ecologists, the study of global environmental politics is by no means restricted to the [norms](#) and structures of global *environmental* governance, such as global environmental treaties, strategies and policy networks. It also extends to the norms and structures of *economic* governance, including organisations such as the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#), the World Bank and the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#), which are directly implicated in structuring global resource use, and investment and development patterns. Indeed, the contradictions between international economic and environmental governance are a central preoccupation of global political ecology and a primary explanation for the puzzle of global environmental politics. For example, increasing attention has been directed to the ways in which the international trade and finance regimes have promoted unsustainable

development patterns and undermined the effectiveness of multilateral environmental agreements.

Unlike neoliberal institutionalists, global political ecologists argue that fine-tuning environmental regimes can only ever be part of the solution to global environmental problems. Their broader goal is to transform social and economic structures to promote environmental justice, environmental security and more socially inclusive and sustainable patterns of production and consumption around the world.

## **The United States as the swinging climate state**

The United States was widely recognised as an environmental leader in the 1970s, but in the post-Cold War period it has oscillated between a laggard and leader in relation to the world's most significant global environmental challenge – climate change. The Clinton administration enthusiastically signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, but it faced a hostile Senate. An international treaty must be ratified by a two-thirds majority of the Senate for it to become domestic law. Several months before to the Kyoto meeting, the Senate had passed a unanimous resolution (the 'Byrd–Hagel resolution') declaring that it would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol if it would harm the US economy or if developing countries were not required to undertake commitments in the same time period as developed countries. The Clinton administration therefore never presented it for formal ratification.

The second Bush administration shared the Senate's views and repudiated the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, which created considerable uncertainty about the future of the regime and prompted efforts to negotiate a new a treaty that included all major emitters by 2009 in Copenhagen. Despite re-engagement with

the negotiations by the new Obama administration in 2009, a new treaty failed to materialise at the Copenhagen talks. Instead, the parties produced a non-binding Copenhagen Accord, which was formally adopted in 2010. However, more concerted diplomatic engagement by the Obama administration in the second attempt to produce a new and inclusive treaty was crucial to the success of the Paris Agreement in 2015. The new Trump administration has reversed the Obama administration's national and diplomatic climate legacy.

While successive administrations have produced significant swings in climate policy and diplomacy, the US Congress generally has remained hostile to climate policy innovation and it has largely rejected the climate regime's burden-sharing principles of differentiated responsibilities discussed above. These principles impose a leadership obligation on developed countries while recognising that developing countries' share of global emissions will need to grow to meet unmet development needs. According to these principles, the United States should incur the biggest mitigation obligation. With less than 5 per cent of the world's population, it has the largest share of historical or cumulative greenhouse gas emissions since industrialisation; it is the second highest aggregate emitter; and it is one of the world's highest per capita emitters. It also has significant economic and technological capabilities to address climate change. Yet, despite the introduction of numerous climate Bills in Congress during the Bush and Obama administrations, only one managed to pass the House of Representatives during the Obama administration's first term, and none has passed the Senate. The Senate's Byrd–Hagel resolution directly contradicted the norm of developed country leadership grounded in CBDR and instead demanded reciprocity from major developing countries and a level playing field.

Given Congressional hostility, the Obama administration's diplomatic strategy sought to circumvent the need for Senate ratification while also

addressing Congressional concerns by engaging in active bilateral climate and energy diplomacy with China. This culminated in the United States–China Joint Announcement on Climate Change in November 2014, which provided a major boost to the negotiations leading up to Paris in 2015. The Obama administration also played a leading role in defending the bottom-up, hybrid architecture of the Paris Agreement, which enabled all parties to make nationally determined pledges that would not be a legally binding component of the new treaty. While these pledges would be reviewed in five-yearly cycles, national governments would retain discretion over how much they would increase ambition in each cycle – an approach that was crucial to winning the support of China and India. It also suited the Obama administration, since it was able to sign the treaty using its executive powers without the need to present it to the Senate for ratification since it had found a way of implementing its climate policies by using its executive powers to regulate carbon pollution under the Clean Air Act, which had been passed by Congress in the early 1970s – so a new law was not required. However, this strategy meant that a new president could easily reverse these executive regulations without Congressional approval.

Most analyses of the failure of the United States as an international climate leader focus on the peculiarities of the US political system, which favours the [status quo](#) by requiring a two-thirds Senate majority for the ratification of treaties. However, while the procedures of the US Senate are certainly crucial to any understanding of US climate policy and diplomacy, they do not explain the ideational character of the response of the United States to climate change or its identity as a (liberal) superpower.

Realists would argue that the relationship the United States has with CBDR can be explained by US concerns over relative gains *vis-à-vis* a rising China and India, while neoliberal institutionalists would explain the position of the United States in terms of a defence of [national interests](#) based on a calculation of the

costs of mitigation relative to vulnerability to climate disruption arising from inaction. However, realists cannot explain why the relative gains enjoyed by developing countries under the Kyoto Protocol are of much greater concern to the United States than to most other developed states – particularly those in Western Europe, which have accepted their climate leadership obligations. Likewise, neoliberal institutionalism cannot explain variations in climate policy over time, or climate policy variation between countries with similar levels of fossil-fuel dependence, because they assume that all states will follow the same cost–benefit calculations when deciding whether to ratify an environmental treaty. Yet cost–benefit calculations can produce vastly different results, depending on how national interests are constructed, the nature of the costs and benefits that are included, the time horizons employed and whether a security, economic, environmental and/or justice framework is applied. Such variations require an understanding not only of relative fossil-fuel dependence and the role of national industry coalitions, but also national differences in the social construction of climate change as a problem, domestic climate policy framing, strategies of capital accumulation and foreign policy identities.

For global political ecologists, a key problem for the United States is that its economic and military strength was developed on the basis of cheap fossil-fuel energy and extensive land development, which Matthew Paterson ([2009](#): 148) has characterised as ‘carboniferous capitalism’. Oil has also been used as a strategic resource to maintain US hegemony both during and after the Cold War. Imposing a ‘price on carbon’ has therefore been rejected by Congress as a threat to US interests and the American way of life, rather than being seen as an opportunity to lead the world towards a low-carbon future. This stands in strong contrast to climate leaders such as Germany, Denmark and Sweden, as well as sub-national states such as California, which have pursued a strategy of ‘ecological modernisation’ through the active promotion of renewable energy

and energy efficiency and the adoption of more proactive climate policies, including a regional emissions trading scheme.

A global political ecology analysis would also draw attention to the fact that the dominant discourses of economic development, fair play and security among political elites in the United States are mostly at odds with the global environmental discourses of sustainable development, environmental justice and ecological security. This dissonance is reflected in the grand strategy of the United States, the central pillars of which are to secure US military and economic supremacy, promote a stable world capitalist system according to US liberal ideals, and promote the spread of liberal democracy. None of these pillars has been interpreted or pursued in ways that are compatible with a low US carbon footprint, planetary sustainability or global environmental justice. No US administration has played an active role in promoting environmental sustainability as a whole-of-government meta-policy at the domestic or international levels. Although the United States has sometimes taken strong domestic and international action in certain environmental policy domains, such as wildlife protection and protection of the ozone layer, environmental issues have never been considered to be, or allowed to impinge upon, matters of ‘high politics’. Rather, US foreign petroleum policy, and complementary domestic policies such as energy and economic policy, typically have constrained the development of a more proactive climate policy at home and abroad. However, as we have seen, one significant exception is the Pentagon, which has traditionally adopted a long-range perspective in its strategic thinking. The Department of Defense (DoD) regards climate change as a significant ‘threat multiplier’, and it has embraced energy efficiency and renewable energy as a ‘force multiplier’. The DoD has emerged as the second largest buyer of renewable energy in the US after Google (Roston and Eckhouse [2016](#)).



**Figure 34.1** Renewable energy in Bavaria, Germany

## Conclusion

As Robert Falkner ([2005](#): 586) has observed, ‘unlike trade and monetary policy, environmental policy has never been central to the US effort to create international order’. However, this will have to change if there is to be a sustainable international order. This is mostly likely to happen through creative issue-linkage between energy security and climate concerns and recognition of the economic and strategic advantages derived from innovation in low-carbon technologies. During the Cold War, one of the relatively benign forms of rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union was the ‘space race’. In the post-Cold War period, the rivalry between the United States and China is likely to include a ‘green high-tech race’. This may be the crucial lever needed to overcome policy gridlock in the US Congress and galvanise both the legislature and the executive to pursue a low-carbon and sustainable future.

## Discussion questions

## Discussion questions

- 34.1** What is ‘sustainable development’? Is it an adequate framework to manage global environmental challenges?
- 34.2** To what extent does the state-system contribute to global ecological problems?
- 34.3** Do you think the environmental crisis should be approached through the frame of environmental security (fear) or environmental justice (fairness)?
- 34.4** Which international relations theory offers the best or most comprehensive explanation for the persistence of the most serious and irreversible global environmental problems?
- 34.5** Why has the United States swung back and forth from climate leader to laggard in the new millennium? What might enable this to change?

## *Further reading*

Bernstein, Steven 2001, *The compromise of liberal environmentalism*, New York: Columbia University Press. *A constructivist analysis of the history of the sustainable development discourse, showing how the discourse has been constrained by the requirements of capitalist economics.*

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Christoff, Peter and Eckersley, Robyn 2013, *Globalization and the environment*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. *Provides a broad conceptual framework for understanding the globalisation of environmental problems and the highly uneven, often faltering international political response.*

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Clapp, Jennifer and Dauvergne, Peter 2011, *Paths to a green world: The political economy of the global environment*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, MA: MIT

Press. *Examines the relationship between economic globalisation and the environment, including trade, investment and finance, with a particular focus on developing countries.*

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Kütting, Gabriela (ed.) 2011, *Global environmental politics: Concepts, theories and case studies*, London: Routledge. *A useful collection that introduces students to the wide range of global environmental politics issues.*

# Climate change



**Peter Newell**

[Introduction](#)

[A brief history of climate change politics](#)

[Explaining the global politics of climate change](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Discussion questions](#)

[Further reading](#)

## Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the [theory](#) and practice of global climate politics. First, it presents a brief history of the politics of climate change as they play out in the international negotiations on the issue overseen by the [United Nations](#). Second, it looks at the formal organisational and institutional structures that exist to manage the international community's response to climate change. Third, it reviews the ways in which different theories of International Relations (IR) have been applied to climate change, assessing both their potential and

limitations. Finally, it offers some thoughts on the evolving nature of the ‘global’ governance of climate change.

The issue of global climate change (see [Box 35.1](#)) has moved to the centre of the international agenda in recent years. As scientific consensus about the severity of uncontrolled warming strengthens around the idea that nations should take immediate steps to reduce their contribution to climate change, politicians are under pressure to act. Yet the fact that climate change is caused by such a wide array of everyday human activities creates a coordination and cooperation challenge of staggering proportions. Added to this, the uneven contribution of nations to the problem and the uneven exposure of different social groups to the worst effects of climate change make it an issue of social justice since, for the most part, those who will suffer the worst impacts of climate change have contributed least to the problem. This links climate change to broader North–South debates about aid, finance, technology and development. Also, despite the fact that many people in vulnerable locations are already exposed to the effects of climate change, some of the most dramatic effects will not be felt for many years. This introduces the complex question of inter-generational justice while providing few incentives for this generation of politicians to bear the brunt of the costs of taking actions from which unborn children will be the primary beneficiaries.

### **Box 35.1: Terminology**

#### **What is climate change?**

The world’s climate system has always undergone dramatic change due to natural variability. What currently causes concern is the observed increase in global surface temperatures, as a consequence of radiative forcing, caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions.

Concentrations of these gases – which include CO<sub>2</sub>, methane and nitrous oxide, as well as gases from the chlorine family – create a ‘greenhouse effect’ that traps incoming radiation from the sun but prevents some of it from being released back into the earth’s atmosphere, hence warming the planet.

As well as being seen as a serious issue in its own right, climate change is also increasingly connected to other key issues in international relations, such as development, trade and security. The connections are apparent in debates about the levels and types of financing to which developing countries should be entitled in order to pay for mitigation (emissions reductions) activities that they undertake for the benefit of the international community and the adaptation measures they have to put in place to protect their citizens from the effects of climate change. They arise through concerns about the use of trade measures such as so-called ‘border tax adjustments’, which seek to tax imported products that have been manufactured in countries not subject to emissions controls (which are claimed to benefit from an unfair competitive advantage when compared with products that have). [Security](#) concerns about ‘climate refugees’ fleeing from areas of the world subject to sea-level rise or extreme weather events, or the impact of climate change in exacerbating tensions over access to water and land viable for agriculture, have brought climate change to the attention of the military establishment.

## **A brief history of climate change politics**

Although we often assume that the high profile that climate change now enjoys means that it is a new political issue, in fact it has a much longer legacy. The governance of climate change as a global political issue has progressed from being a cause for concern among a growing number of scientists to gaining recognition as an issue deserving of a collective global effort orchestrated by the United Nations (see [Box 35.2](#)). Over time, there has been a deepening of cooperation and a firming up of obligations to act – a process common to many international negotiations on the environment, where a general agreement identifies the need for action and a subsequent protocol contains concrete legally binding emissions-reductions commitments. What is also notable, and a theme to which we will return below, is the increasing use of market or flexible mechanisms to achieve emissions reductions.

### **Box 35.2: Discussion points**

#### **The global governance of climate change: A short chronology**

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1988 | World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere: politicians and scientists conclude that ‘humanity is conducting an unintended, uncontrolled, globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to nuclear war’. The conference recommends reducing CO <sub>2</sub> emissions by 20 per cent by 2005.   |
| 1990 | The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) publishes its First Assessment Report.   |
| 1991 | The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee is set up to oversee negotiations towards an international agreement.   |
| 1992 | 154 countries at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio sign the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which aims to stabilise emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000 as part of an overall goal to stabilise greenhouse gas (GHG) ‘concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous interference with the climate system’. |
| 1994 | The UNFCCC enters into force on 21 March.   |

- 1995 The first Conference of the Parties (CoP) agrees in Berlin that binding commitments by industrialised countries are required to reduce emissions.
- 1995 The IPCC publishes its Second Assessment Report, which argues that, ‘The balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate’.
- 1996 The second CoP in Geneva sees the US agree to legally binding targets to reduce emissions as long as emissions trading is included in an agreement.
- 1997 More than 150 countries sign the Kyoto Protocol, which binds thirty-eight industrialised (Annex 1) countries to reduce GHG emissions by an average of 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels during the period 2008–12.
- 2000 The negotiations at the sixth CoP in The Hague collapse amid disagreements principally between the United States and Europe about the use of the Kyoto Protocol’s flexibility mechanisms.
- 2001 US President George W. Bush announces his country is to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol.
- 2001 In Marrakesh the final elements of the Kyoto Protocol are worked out, particularly the rules and procedures by which the flexible mechanisms will operate.
- 2005 On 16 February, the Kyoto Protocol becomes law after Russian [ratification](#) pushes the emissions of ratified Annex 1 countries over the 55 per cent mark.
- 2007 The IPCC publishes its Fourth Assessment Report.
- 2007 At CoP 13, the Bali Action Plan is agreed, which calls for a long-term goal for emissions reductions; measurable, reportable, verifiable mitigation commitments including nationally appropriate mitigation actions by less-developed countries (LDCs), as well as enhanced adaptation, action on technology development and transfer and financial resources and investment to support the above.
- 2009 CoP 15 takes place in Copenhagen amid chaotic scenes and failure by negotiators to ‘seal the deal’. Instead the Copenhagen Accord is produced by a limited number of countries, which is not legally binding but whose existence is noted by a number of countries despite initial protests about the exclusionary way in which it was produced.
- 2010 CoP 16 produces the ‘Cancún agreements’, which seek to keep the negotiations on track in the areas of adaptation, forests, climate finance, technology transfer and capacity-building in the wake of the fiasco at Copenhagen.
- 2011 In Durban at CoP 17, governments committed to adopt a universal legal agreement on climate change as soon as possible, but not later than 2015, to come into effect in 2020. A new group called the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action takes this forward

the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action takes this forward.

- 2014 IPCC *Fifth Assessment Report* is published. It concludes that, ‘Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. Recent climate changes have had widespread impacts on human and natural systems. Their effects, together with those of other anthropogenic drivers, have been detected throughout the climate system and are extremely likely to have been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.’
- 2015 A new universal Paris Agreement is concluded which contains the aspirations to keep warming below 1.5°C and to achieve net zero emissions by the second half of the century. Though the agreement establishes legally binding procedures to review countries’ commitments on a five-yearly basis, the Intended Nationally-Determined Contributions which countries provided at Paris are not legally binding.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was agreed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. As the first major milestone in the history of climate diplomacy, the UNFCCC provided a framework for global action on the issue. It sought to emulate the apparent success of the ozone [regime](#), which first produced the Vienna Convention establishing the nature of the problem and the basis for remedial action, and subsequently the Montreal Protocol, which agreed a phase-out of the most damaging ozone-depleting chemicals. Given the sharp differences of opinion described above, and the relative lack of momentum behind the issue at the time, the fact the UNFCCC was agreed at all can be considered a substantial achievement. The agreement set the goal of ‘avoiding dangerous interference in the climate system’, defined as aiming to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, and listed some policies and measures that countries might adopt to achieve that end. Acknowledging the vast differences in contributions to the problem, the Convention established the principle of ‘common but differentiated

responsibility’ and recognised that developing countries were not yet in a position to assume obligations to act. Efforts they could make towards tackling the issue were made dependent on the receipt of aid and technology transfer from Northern countries that were meant to be ‘additional’ to existing aid budgets.



**Figure 35.1** Wind farm

Attention then turned to how to realise the general nature of the commitments contained in the UNFCCC. With scientific assessments of the severity of climate change becoming increasingly common, and growing awareness of the inadequacy of existing policy responses, momentum built for a follow-up to the convention. The 1995 Berlin Mandate at the first Conference of the Parties (CoP) sought to promote quantified emissions limitations and reduction obligations (QELROs), and negotiations thus began towards a Protocol that would set legally binding targets to reduce GHG emissions. The Kyoto Protocol, concluded in 1997, was the outcome of this (see [Box 35.3](#)). Signed by more than 150 countries, it bound 38 industrialised countries (so called Annex 1 parties) to reduce GHG emissions by an average of 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels during the period 2008–12. It fixed differentiated targets for industrialised countries while setting in train a process to further elaborate ‘flexible mechanisms’ such as the joint implementation scheme, emissions trading

schemes (ETS) and a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), discussed further below. The idea was that these market mechanisms would allow for countries to pay for emissions reductions wherever it was cheapest to do so.

### **Box 35.3: Key texts**

#### **The Kyoto Protocol in brief**

##### **Commitments**

- Industrialised countries will reduce their collective emissions of GHG by an average of 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels in the commitment period 2008–12.
- The United States has to reduce its emissions by an average of 7 per cent; Japan by an average of 6 per cent and the European Union by an average of 8 per cent. Other industrialised countries are permitted small increases while others are obliged only to freeze their emissions.

##### **Instruments**

- *Clean development mechanism*: The aim of this body is to assist developing countries in ‘achieving sustainable development’ and at the same time to help developed countries ‘in achieving compliance with their quantified emission limitation and reduction commitments’. In effect, its purpose is to oversee the implementation of projects funded by developed states wanting to accrue credits for emissions reductions achieved overseas. Reduction credits are certified by

the CDM Executive Board to ensure that projects add value to savings that would have occurred anyway (Article 12).

- *Joint implementation*: Actions implemented jointly have to be ‘additional to any that would otherwise occur’ and ‘supplemental to domestic actions’. Scope is provided to include ‘verifiable changes in stocks of sinks’ in parties’ assessment of their net GHG emissions (Article 6).
- *Emissions trading* (Article 17).

The process for finalising the rules and operational details of the Protocol was agreed at CoP 4 in 1998 as part of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action. In November 2000, parties met in The Hague at CoP 6 to try to complete these negotiations, but failed to do so amid a growing rift between the European Union and the United States in particular. Having negotiated and lobbied hard for the inclusion of market-based mechanisms that would allow industrialised countries maximum flexibility, in 2001 the United States walked away from the Kyoto Protocol. Part of the reason for the refusal of the United States to ratify Kyoto was because its economic competitors in the developing world were not required to reduce their emissions. Without the involvement of the United States, many assumed the inevitable demise of the Kyoto Protocol. If the largest contributor to the problem and most powerful economy in the world was not on board, what incentive was there for others to sign up? In fact, the absence of the United States served to galvanise the European Union and the coalition formed by the

[G77](#) group of less developed countries plus China (G77 + China) into further action, and with the Russian ratification of the Kyoto Protocol in 2005 it entered into force.

Subsequent negotiations focused on detailed issues concerning the implementation and enforcement of Kyoto and what might come in its place as 2012, the end of the implementation period, drew closer. At CoP 7, the Marrakesh Accords were agreed, which established the rules and procedures for the operation of the flexible mechanisms including the CDM, as well as details of reporting and methodologies. Importantly, they also established three new funds: the Least Developed Countries Fund, the Special Climate Change Fund and the Adaptation Fund. The Bali Action Plan, agreed at CoP 13 in 2007, then set the path for negotiations towards Copenhagen, calling for a long-term goal for emissions reductions; measurable, reportable, verifiable mitigation commitments including nationally appropriate mitigation actions by less-developed countries (LDCs); as well as enhanced adaptation, action on technology development and transfer and financial resources, and investment to support the above.

Unfortunately, the 2009 CoP 15 meeting failed to agree on a new legally binding agreement despite intense pressure to ‘seal the deal’. A ‘Copenhagen Accord’ was produced by a small number of powerful countries, including China, India, Brazil and South Africa – reflecting the growing economic and political power of those countries as well as their own rising contribution to the problem of climate change. The failure of the meeting to advance progress and the breakdown in trust that occurred left the negotiations in a state of disarray. This was, at least in part, rectified by the Cancún meeting in 2010, which agreed to a series of decisions on key areas of the Bali Action Plan, on issues such as finance – most notably the creation of the Green Climate Fund – as well as technology cooperation and adaptation. In Durban in 2011, governments decided

to adopt a universal legal agreement on climate change as soon as possible, but not later than 2015, to come into effect in 2020 under the auspices of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP).

This laid the framework for the Paris Agreement, concluded in December 2015 to much fanfare and relief after many difficult years of negotiation. It is a universal legally binding agreement that goes beyond the developed–developing country ‘firewall’ that was put in place by the Kyoto agreement and marked a fundamental change in the approach to climate diplomacy by shifting the emphasis from top-down targets negotiated internationally to bottom-up commitments proposed nationally. It effectively establishes mechanisms for reviewing and ratcheting up commitments made voluntarily by states as ‘Intended Nationally Determined Commitments’. The function of the agreement is to ensure that these commitments are collectively sufficient to keep warming well below 2°C with the aspiration to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C. Regular five yearly reviews are meant to ensure that the internationally community achieves net zero emissions by the second half of the century.

### **The organisation of the negotiations**

The international negotiations on climate change are organised around a number of key actors, institutions and decision-making processes. Three institutions are critical to the process of negotiating climate change policy. First, the secretariat of the UNFCCC, based in Bonn since 1996, organises and oversees the negotiations, prepares the necessary documentation and is responsible for overseeing the reporting of emissions profiles and projects funded through the Kyoto Protocol. Guided by the Parties to the Convention, it provides organisational support and technical expertise to the negotiations and institutions, and facilitates the flow of authoritative information on the

implementation of the Convention. It has a key and often under-estimated role to play in shaping the outcomes of the negotiations (Depledge [2005](#)). It also has an executive secretary, who is responsible for trying to guide the negotiations towards a successful conclusion. Second, the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol meets annually to review progress on commitments contained in those treaties and to update them in the light of the latest scientific advice. This is the ultimate decision-making body in the climate negotiations. Third, the Subsidiary Bodies on Implementation (SBI) and Science and Technology (SBSTA) and the Ad Hoc Working Groups take forward negotiations on specific issues that the CoP ultimately has to approve.

In order to shape this process, governments often organise themselves into blocs and negotiating coalitions to enhance their influence and to advance common agendas. These key coalitions and negotiating blocs emerged early on in the negotiations, but have evolved significantly since then as the issues changed and their levels of economic development altered dramatically. At one end of the spectrum, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) grouping quickly emerged as the coalition of states most hostile to action on climate change. With revenues almost entirely dependent on the export of oil, that opposition was unsurprising. This bloc affected the pace and course of the negotiations, with calls for greater scientific certainty before action could take place, the formation of [alliances](#) with businesses opposed to action and the use of wrecking tactics such as the call for compensation for loss of oil revenue in response to the call from many low-lying developing countries for economic compensation for impacts suffered as a result of climate change (Newell [2000](#)).

At the other end of the spectrum, the Alliance of Small Island states (AOSIS), a coalition of island states most vulnerable to the effects of sea-level rise, has been the most strident of the negotiating coalitions in its demands for far-reaching and stringent emissions reductions targets. In 1995, it proposed its

own protocol to the agreement mandating a 20 per cent cut in 1990 emissions by 2005. The AOSIS group works closely with the London-based legal group Foundation for International Environmental Law and Development (FIELD), which was attributed a key role in drafting the AOSIS protocol, suggesting the fragility of rigid distinctions about who exercises power and authority in the governance of climate change (Arts [1998](#)).

In between these two polarities, the G77 + China coalition has traditionally emphasised the North's primary contribution to the problem of climate change and sought to deflect calls for the South to make commitments and to ensure that funds committed to achieve the convention's goals were genuinely additional to existing money for aid. The G77, while now less cohesive, continues to provide a platform for shared concerns about climate change policy. The European Union, meanwhile, has been keen to see a stronger agreement, while the United States – particularly during the administrations of presidents Bush Snr and Jnr – was resolutely opposed to legally binding cuts in greenhouse gases. Japan has adopted a position between these two, as host to the summit that produced the Kyoto Protocol, but is often a reluctant leader because of high levels of industry pressure not to over-commit.

Alongside the formal negotiations organised in plenary sessions and working groups that meet in parallel to discuss specific issues, a bewildering array of non-government, business and other organisations are registered to participate in the process. Although they do not have formal voting rights, they are allowed to make interventions and are often admitted onto government delegations, where they have access to all the meetings taking place. In many ways, these actors are non-governmental 'diplomats', performing many of the same functions as state delegates: representing the interests of their constituencies; engaging in information exchange; negotiating and providing policy advice (Betsill and Corell [2008](#)). Demands for participation in climate

change negotiations have created a massive strain on the capacity of countries to host these events. This issue came to a head at the Copenhagen CoP 15 in December 2009, when the premises could not accommodate a record 900 observer organisations and the security entourages of 196 heads of states. Entry passes were rationed – often under chaotic circumstances – and many observers were shut out of the building where negotiations were taking place.

We can see, therefore, that the process of making climate policy involves international organisations and institutional structures established for this purpose, coalitions and blocs of state actors, and a range of [non-state actors](#) who have sought to influence the process of negotiation in a variety of ways.

## **Explaining the global politics of climate change**

The issue of climate change has attracted increasing attention from IR scholars from all theoretical perspectives. Many earlier interpretations understandably fell back on familiar tools and existing theoretical canons to make sense of this ‘new’ challenge. [Regime](#) theory, which seeks to explain the emergence, evolution and effectiveness of international cooperation (Haas et al. [1993](#); Krasner [1983](#); Vogler [1995](#); Young [1998](#)), appeared to offer a useful entry point for explaining the negotiations around the UNFCCC and subsequent Kyoto Protocol, and this is where a lot of attention has remained. Sometimes referred to as [neoliberal institutionalism](#), regime theory covers a range of perspectives that place different emphases on the role of [power](#) (particularly the [hegemonic](#) power of leading states such as the United States), the extent to which institutions exercise their own degree of power, which is more than the sum of their parts, and the degree to which expert or knowledge-based communities

play a role in creating the enabling conditions for international cooperation (Hasenclever et al. [1997](#)).

It is increasingly difficult, however, to account for the history and contemporary nature of responses to climate change using traditional IR theories. While growing links to security issues may mean that [realists](#) devote more attention to the issue than they have done in the past, their preoccupation with a narrow set of questions around [anarchy](#), [order](#) and international security does not shed much light on the nature of global responses to climate change. Power-based regime perspectives, which place emphasis on the role of a hegemonic power in creating the conditions in which cooperation between states is possible, might point to the decisive role of the United States in the climate negotiations. As historically the largest contributor to the problem of climate change, the United States has played a veto role in stalling international agreements which it does not approve of, such as the Kyoto Protocol. The abstention of the United States from the agreement also made it easier for other countries to refuse to take action. Reaching the levels of finance now required – US\$100 billion a year by 2020, according to the Copenhagen Accord – will also rely on the active support and cooperation of powerful actors such as the United States, the European Union and Japan. Yet the climate negotiations continued in the absence of US leadership and the climate regime has very much developed a life of its own, with a series of institutions under its umbrella that are not readily unsettled by the shifting preferences of government administrations that come and go.

Theories of international regimes help us to understand the role of interests and knowledge in shaping the nature of responses to date. Pointing towards the ways in which institutions can reduce transaction costs, improve information flows and generate trust among parties, they draw attention to the ways in which bodies such as the UNFCCC can guide states towards cooperative outcomes

(Depledge [2005](#)). They provide useful insights into the micro-politics of negotiations and deal-brokering within institutions and between [states](#). Work that emphasises the relationship between power and knowledge – particularly with reference to the forms of expertise exercised by scientists and economists in climate policy debates – usefully helps us to understand why the problem of climate is constructed and framed in one way and not another (Hajer [1997](#); Litfin [1994](#); Wynne [1994](#)). Ideas about ‘epistemic communities’ (Haas [1990](#)) have been applied to the role of the UN IPCC, which plays a consensus-building and agenda-setting role in the climate change negotiations (Paterson [1996](#)). Many accounts within IR have also drawn attention to the importance of non-state actors in shaping outcomes in climate politics and influencing states’ negotiating positions (Arts [1998](#); Betsill and Corell [2008](#); Newell [2000](#)). More recent work has gone beyond this to explore the governance roles played by such actors in their own right, creating forms of transnational governance that set targets, generate funding and oversee project implementation in ways that complement, as well as go beyond, the UN regime (Andonova et al. [2009](#); Bulkeley et al. [2016](#); Hoffman and Weiss 2011).

Coming from a [Marxist](#) and [critical theory](#) perspective, some writers in IR suggest that to understand the nature of global responses to climate change more deeply, we have to look at the role of states in a capitalist global political economy and the way in which [capitalism](#) structures opportunities for action (Gale [1998](#); Levy and Newell [2002](#)). Focusing on the relationship between the state and market (or the state and capital in Marxist terms), these accounts suggest that barriers to cooperation are less about fears of states free-riding on the collective efforts of others to address the problem or narrow calculations of national interest; rather, they reflect the structural relationship between states and the businesses on which they depend for jobs, taxation and in some cases party funding, but whose emissions they are expected to regulate to tackle climate

change (Newell and Paterson [1998](#)). According to this perspective, therefore, change will have to come from shifts in the economic system, or at the very least the emergence of sections of the business community (fractions of capital) that see climate change as an investment opportunity rather than a threat to their business if action on the issue is to meaningfully advance (Newell and Paterson [2010](#)).

Rather than view each of these perspectives as incompatible and in competition with one another, it is worth remembering that they seek to explain different aspects of global climate governance. Many focus on one particular source of power (knowledge-based theories), while others seek to go beyond the regime itself to locate climate change as a feature of the organisation of political and economic power in the global economy (Marxist and critical theory accounts). Accounts that emphasise the importance of non-state actors also bring an added dimension to those regime approaches that underscore the primary importance of states and their relationship to international institutions. There is value, therefore, in keeping an open mind about which aspects of global climate politics can be explained by which theories.

As the climate change regime broadens to address new areas, enrol new actors and develop novel policy instruments, theoretical approaches face fresh challenges to their assumptions about who the relevant actors are, the scales at which they operate, and the ways in which they govern. To take one example: increasingly climate politics is conducted by and for markets. Whether it is the use of emissions trading (as in the European Union), the Clean Development Mechanism (between Annex 1 and non-Annex 1 parties) or the growth of voluntary carbon markets alongside the regime, the marketisation of climate governance, as with other areas of the environment, is a notable trend (Newell [2008](#)). These mechanisms extend the reach of global governance mechanisms to the livelihoods of millions of the world's poor in Asia, Africa and Latin America

working in the forestry, energy or waste sectors, raising issues of who benefits and how. They rely on elaborate networks of intermediaries and brokers, accountants, lawyers and project developers operating across a variety of scales to enable the markets to function. They operate in the shadow of hierarchy, but require systems of governance that extend way beyond what states alone can provide. Capturing and adequately explaining the nature of these governance arrangements requires an attempt to think outside conventional disciplinary boundaries.

## **Conclusion**

It seems likely that climate change is here to stay as an issue on the global political agenda. How high a place on that agenda it occupies will depend on the extent to, and ways in, which it is linked to other issues of ‘high’ politics such as trade and security and its intimate ties to key resources such as energy, water and land.

There continues to be an alarming disconnect between what we know about climate change as a scientific and social phenomenon, what this implies in terms of urgent and large-scale change, and the seeming inability of governments and private actors globally to respond in a timely and decisive manner. Perceptions of the slow and inadequate nature of responses to the threat provide the rationale and point of departure for many of the innovations and experiments in climate governance that have mushroomed in recent years, through collaborations, partnerships and private regimes involving cities, local governments, the private sector and civil society, as well as recent mobilisations of movements for climate justice and divestment from fossil fuels (Bulkeley and Newell [2015](#)). Actions and initiatives such as these are perhaps more empowering than waiting and

hoping that the UN machinery will deliver effective cuts to global GHG emissions. In and of themselves, though, they may not be enough. Those who place their faith in carbon markets to trade their way out of trouble still need targets and timetables to steer the market regarding how many permits will be available and over what timeframes. Likewise, private governance and standard-setting may have an important role to play, but it cannot achieve the degree of comprehensiveness or enforce the same sanctions that state-backed regulation can. And while community-based mobilisations play a vital role both in mobilising people to reduce their own emissions and preparing for the effects of climate change, such initiatives would benefit from being scaled up and coordinated in a way that implies a role for the state. The challenge, increasingly, is how to coordinate and steer multiple systems of climate governance – both public and private – that operate across numerous scales (Bulkeley 2016).

The discipline of IR can and should have an important role to play in explaining responses to climate change, assessing their effectiveness and suggesting ways forward for tackling this most complex and ‘wicked’ of problems. It remains a challenge for all of us to be thinking openly, innovatively and critically about the pathways before us if we are to make a contribution to ensuring that this does not come to be defined, as the title of a recent film suggests, as the ‘age of stupid’.

## **Discussion questions**

**35.1** What makes climate change a political issue?

**35.2** How has the climate change regime evolved over time and how can this best be explained?

**35.3** How far do divisions between the global North and South remain the principal barrier to progress in the climate change negotiations?

**35.4** How significant are non-state actors to collective efforts to respond to climate change?

**35.5** How can we best explain the global politics of climate change using different theories of International Relations?

### *Further reading*

Bulkeley, Harriet and Newell, Peter 2016, *Governing climate change*, London: Routledge. *An overview of climate governance from the international regime to organised responses from cities, businesses and communities, and the theoretical challenges this raises.*

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Newell, Peter 2000, *Climate for change: Non-state actors and the global politics of the greenhouse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *An assessment and explanation of the political influence of a range of non-state actors (the scientific community, mass media, business groups and environmental NGOs) upon the climate regime up to the Kyoto Protocol.*

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Newell, Peter and Paterson, Matthew 2010, *Climate capitalism: Global warming and the transformation of the global economy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Provides a history of carbon markets and the intertwining of climate change politics and the global economy while also suggesting the conditions under which 'climate capitalism' might be possible.*

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Paterson, Matthew 1996, *Global warming, global politics*, London: Routledge. *Assesses different strands of IR theory on the basis of their ability to explain processes of international cooperation around the UNFCCC.*

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Roberts, Timmons and Parks, Bradley 2007, *Climate of injustice: Global inequality, North–South politics and climate policy*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Shows how North–South conflicts in climate negotiations are a feature of broader historical inequities between developed and less-developed countries.

# Glossary

Glossary terms are highlighted in **blue** throughout the text. Words in *italics* in the entries are defined elsewhere in the glossary.

## **A.Q. Khan network**

An illicit global network for the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology named after one of its leading figures, Pakistani nuclear scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan.

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## **Alliance**

A formal agreement between two or more [sovereign states](#) to cooperate on matters of [security](#) and defence.

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## **Alter-casting**

A strategy wherein one actor cajoles another (or others) into a certain way of being or behaving by treating the other(s) consistently with their view of appropriate conduct.

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## **Anarchy**

The absence of rule or government. In international relations, it does not mean disorder and chaos.

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## **Anthropocene**

A proposed geological epoch marked by the significant impact of human activity on the earth's ecosystems. There is no agreement about when the epoch began, with some dating it to the Industrial Revolution and others to the late twentieth century.

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### **Anti-colonialism**

The ideology and struggle opposed to [colonialism](#); it helped fuel the [decolonisation](#) process.

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### **ANZUS**

A [security](#) agreement between Australia, New Zealand and the United States that came into force in 1952. Each party agrees, under certain conditions, to assist others in the case of armed attack. Since 1986, when New Zealand refused entry to US ships that may have been carrying nuclear weapons, the United States has not recognised its commitment to New Zealand.

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### **Arms control**

The exercise of restraint in the development, acquisition, stockpiling and use of weapons. The management of this process usually is achieved through negotiated agreements or treaties.

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### **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**

Formed in 1967 to promote regional stability and economic cooperation, it currently comprises ten state members: Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

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### **Balance of payments**

A [state's](#) capital account surplus or deficit, based on the difference between the amount of money flowing in or out of the state. It is the account of a

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state's financial transactions with the rest of the world.

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### **Balance of power**

Refers to a mechanism that operates to prevent one [state](#) from achieving such a preponderance of [power](#) that it is in a position to lay down and enforce the law over all others. Central to [realist](#) theories, it can be viewed as the deliberate product of foreign policies, or as the unintended consequence of several states seeking to protect themselves. In any case, states align with others to counter-balance the growth in another's power, seeking to preserve international [order](#) and a degree of equilibrium.

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### **Bilateralism**

A term referring to discussions, negotiations and decisions made by two [states](#) on matters of mutual interest. Compare with [unilateralism](#) and [multilateralism](#).

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### **Bipolarity**

Refers to an [international system](#) where two overwhelmingly powerful [states](#) dominate. Like magnetic poles, the two [powers](#) both attract and repel at the same time. They attract friends and allies, and repel rivals and enemies. The [Cold War](#) is the best example of a bipolar system. Compare with [unipolarity](#) and [multipolarity](#).

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### **Bretton Woods**

Refers to the post-World War II system of international trade and finance. It saw the establishment of the [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\)](#) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, popularly known as the [World Bank](#). Together with the [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade \(GATT\)](#) which was established by the [United Nations](#), it formed the system

which was intended to stabilise the international economy under liberal economic policy goals. It is named for the place in New Hampshire in the United States where the original agreement was struck.

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### **Capitalism**

A social system that favours free and open markets based on private property and the accumulation of private wealth. Eighteenth-century Scotsman Adam Smith conventionally is associated with the ideological defence of capitalism, while Karl Marx is capitalism's greatest critic.

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### **Civil war**

War fought largely within the territorial boundaries of a single [sovereign state](#).

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### **Clausewitzean**

An adjective describing strategic thought influenced by the work of Prussian military officer Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831). His *On War*, published posthumously in 1832, is still widely recognised as the most important treatise ever written on military strategy. For Clausewitz, [war](#) is a decisive encounter between two or more armed forces of a [state](#). His most famous proposition is that war is simply the continuation of politics by other, namely violent, means.

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### **Cold War**

Describes a condition of hostile encounter between two [states](#) or [alliances](#) that falls just short of 'hot war' or direct violent conflict. It is mostly used to name the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union from roughly 1946 to 1989. Although the two [superpowers](#) did not apparently fight one another directly, they often fought by proxy. Because it is historically unusual for two pre-eminent [powers](#) not to wage war against each other, some commentators also refer to the Cold War as a 'long [peace](#)'.

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## **Collective security**

Also draws from the Three Musketeers' motto, 'one for all and all for one'. Rather than leave [security](#) in the hands of each individual [state](#), security for all is shared by all. If one state is threatened or attacked, the collective will react. Collective security is embodied in the [UN Charter](#).

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## **Colonialism**

The practice of occupying foreign lands by forceful or peaceful means with the intention of developing or civilising 'backward' peoples of the non-European world. In the twentieth century colonialism earned a bad name because it often reinforces racial stereotypes or discriminatory practices. Compare [decolonisation](#).

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## **Common security**

Underpinned by the idea that [security](#) is best achieved with others rather than against them. Common security is promoted through [arms control](#) and confidence and security-building measures (CSBMs). It originated in the [UN](#) Palme Commission Report of 1982 but found energetic political support in former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev and former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans. It is premised on the belief that the [security dilemma](#) can be overcome, or at least lessened.

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## **Communism**

A social system that favours government-controlled markets based on collective ownership and the distribution of wealth according to need. Karl Marx was communism's greatest advocate. Communist ideology is also said to have governed the Soviet Union, although Marx probably would have disagreed.

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## **Communitarianism**

A political theory that emphasises individuals' attachments to the community in which they grew up. The communities in which we grow up are thought to be the source of all moral values. Communitarianism adopts the ethical position that a person's moral obligations are always first and foremost to members of our own community and that they cannot be extended beyond that community's boundaries. Moreover, it believes that communities should not be expected to submit to abstract or universal values or obligations advocated by [cosmopolitanism](#).

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## **Constitutionalism**

The exercise of decision-making power or governance on the basis of an original constitution, charter or set of foundational rules.

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## **Constitutive**

Having the power of bringing something (an actor or set of rules) into existence. A constitutive rule specifies who counts as a legitimate actor and what kind of acts or moves are legitimate. See [regulative](#) rule.

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## **Constructivism**

A theory that challenges the belief that social structures are more or less natural phenomena. Constructivists argue that the social world is formed through [constitutive](#) linguistic and social practices, thus leaving open the possibility for societies to transform their social worlds. In this respect constructivism converges with [critical theories](#) such as [feminism](#) and [Frankfurt School Critical Theory](#) as well as some [Marxist](#) theories. However, some critical theorists believe that constructivism sometimes remains too close to [positivist methodologies](#).

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## Containment

A [Cold War](#) US strategy for keeping the Soviet Union within its extant boundaries and preventing the further spread of [communism](#). The [Truman Doctrine](#) and [Marshall Plan](#) are said to be respectively the military and economic aspects of containment.

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## Cosmopolitanism

A political [theory](#) that emphasises individuals' obligations to all other human beings. It rejects the [communitarian](#) position that a person's moral obligations end at the political borders of our community. When asked where he came from, the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes the Cynic responded by saying he was a 'citizen of the world'. Cosmopolitanism does not deny local or national attachments and obligations; it just does not see why they must always be privileged. [critical theories](#) often have strong inclinations to cosmopolitanism.

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## Critical theory

Any [theory](#) that seeks to question traditional theoretical methods and purposes. It is usually guided by a suspicion towards [empiricism](#) and [positivism](#) and a commitment to overcoming forms of social, economic and political domination. It thus includes, among others, [feminism](#), [postmodernism](#), [Marxism](#) and [Critical Theory](#) – all of which are sceptical of claims that the world is as it must be. In this respect it converges with [constructivism](#) too.

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## Critical Theory

A specific type of [Marxist](#)-inspired [critical theory](#) deriving from the [Frankfurt School](#) of social theory.

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## **Cuban missile crisis**

Occurred in 1962. The United States discovered that the Soviet Union was installing medium-range nuclear missiles in Cuba, only miles from the coast of Florida. When US President John F. Kennedy imposed a naval blockade, a thirteen-day stand-off ensued in which the world came very close to nuclear [war](#). Kennedy and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev eventually reached a compromise that allowed the Soviets to 'save face' and the Americans to remove the missiles. It inaugurated a period of [détente](#) between the [superpowers](#).

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## **Decolonisation**

The process by which [colonial powers](#) withdrew from or were expelled from foreign territories over which they ruled. It granted [sovereign](#) independence to peoples formerly ruled by colonial powers. The years following World War II saw the height of this process. See [anti-colonialism](#).

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## **Deconstruction**

A theoretical mode developed by Jacques Derrida aimed at destabilising taken-for-granted assumptions and binary oppositions.

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## **Democracy**

Born in ancient Athens, it is a powerful idea and popular political practice to ensure that individuals and communities rule themselves by participating in decision-making processes that affect their lives. In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln famously defined democracy as 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. Democracy may be direct, as in ancient Athens, where small face-to-face communities deliberated and decided on their own

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political futures, or indirect, where representatives are elected to govern on behalf of the people.

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### **Democratic peace theory**

The theory that democratic [states](#) do not fight [war](#) against each other. A good amount of [empirical](#) evidence has been collected indicating that war has never been fought between two stable [democracies](#). Closely associated with Michael Doyle.

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### **Détente**

Relaxation of tensions between rivals. A period of the [Cold War](#) that commenced in the early 1960s after the [Cuban missile crisis](#) and was reinforced by the initiatives of US President Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger.

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### **Deterrence**

A policy or strategy based on the threat of massive retaliation in the event of an attack. It is premised on the notion that if the destruction threatened in retaliation is great enough, it will deter any initial attack. It is mostly associated with nuclear weapons. Nuclear deterrence is also known as mutually assured destruction (MAD).

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### **Diplomacy**

The formal and informal activity by which [states](#) interact with each other. Somewhat romantically described as ‘the art of negotiation’, diplomacy involves the exchange of agents (diplomats, envoys, consular officials) who represent the [state’s](#) interests abroad and negotiate on its behalf. Diplomacy may take place secretly or publicly, [bilaterally](#) or [multilaterally](#) (for example, at the [United Nations](#)).

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## **Disarmament**

A means and an end involving the reduction or elimination of weapons.

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## **Discipline**

A branch of learning focused on a relatively distinct subject matter, including a distinctive focus, set of institutions and traditions of thought.

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## **Emancipation**

The process and condition of being free from all forms of domination, oppression, exclusion and injustice. It is thus central to [liberalism](#) as well as [critical theories](#), including [Marxism](#), [feminism](#) and [Frankfurt School Critical Theory](#), though how each theory defines freedom differs greatly.

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## **Empiricism**

A philosophy based on the idea that experience is the source of knowledge. Empiricist [methods](#) proceed through examination of phenomena that can be perceived through the senses, predominantly observable phenomena. It is sceptical of knowledge drawn from ideas, beliefs and [norms](#), or any knowledge that does not appear empirically verifiable.

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## **English School**

An approach to international relations that focuses on the rules and institutions that bring [order](#) to [international society](#). It holds the view that while [states](#) exist in a formal [anarchy](#), they still form a society. It draws upon and is closely associated with the [Grotian](#) tradition.

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## **Enlightenment**

A period commencing in the late seventeenth century and culminating at the end of eighteenth-century Europe that saw tremendous intellectual change in

the natural, human and social sciences, including the rise of [liberalism](#) and the American and French [Revolutions](#). It also refers to the process of employing reason to challenge received ways of thinking and acting. Though diverse, enlightenment as process includes some common features: the exercise of suspicion towards authority, especially traditional modes of religious and political thinking; the expression of moral, legal and political equality among all humans; the commitment to [emancipation](#) from unnecessary constraints.

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### **Epistemology**

The branch of philosophy that studies how we produce and acquire knowledge. It is concerned with establishing the conditions for producing valid knowledge, and establishing criteria for testing and justifying knowledge claims.

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### **Ethnic cleansing**

The systematic, deliberate and violent attempt to expel or eliminate targeted ethnic groups from disputed or conflict-ridden territories. Ethnic cleansing was conducted, probably by all sides, but most prominently by Serbian militia, during the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

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### **Eurocentrism**

The view that Europe, its people, its ideas and its history are the centre of world history, the repository of the most civilised values, or the norm or ideal against which others are to be measured and judged.

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### **Failed state**

A state where the government is no longer able to exert authority or [power](#) over its people and territory.

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## **Fascism**

A twentieth-century doctrine of authoritarianism hostile to peace and characterised by militarism, aggressive [nationalism](#), racism and [imperialism](#).

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## **Feminism**

A [critical theory](#) that focuses on the place of women and on the role of gender in international relations. It highlights the way women are historically marginalised and disempowered by the prevailing structures of domestic and international politics. Additionally, it has explored the way gendered stereotypes (masculinity and femininity) shape actors' identities and expectations.

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## **Foreign aid**

The transfer of money and resources to less developed or developing countries from developed countries. Usually the aid is given as a long-term loan with conditions attached.

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## **Foundationalism**

Adherence to the belief that knowledge can and must be built on firm foundations or grounds. This quest for certainty, often associated with [positivism](#), is a response to the uncertainty thought to result from interpretive [theories](#).

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## **Frankfurt School**

The name given to a group of German émigrés, led by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who fled to New York and California during World War II after working in the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. They pioneered a form of critical social [theory](#) influenced by German thinkers Immanuel [Kant](#), G.W.F. Hegel and Karl [Marx](#), among others, that challenged prevailing social,

political and economic structures in an effort to [emancipate](#) all individuals and communities from unjust forms of domination and exclusion. It is the inspiration behind [Critical Theory](#).

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### **Free trade**

The idea that governments should not interfere in cross-border trade. Closely associated with [liberalism](#) and [capitalism](#), it is also the governing ideology of the [WTO \(World Trade Organization\)](#), formerly the [GATT \(General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade\)](#).

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### **Fundamentalism**

Refers to the tendency to suppose that one's own ideological or belief system is unquestionably true and should be adhered to absolutely. Anyone who does not adhere to the purity of this system of beliefs is thought to be a heretic or infidel, and is often cast as evil. It is often associated with religions – for example, Islamic or Christian fundamentalism – but any ideology or belief may be susceptible to fundamentalism.

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### **G20, G8**

The Group of 20, Group of 8, or 'G-system' refers to the forums established by the world's leading industrial states to manage global economic affairs. The formation of these Groups began in the 1970s and the composition and number of the Group has expanded over time to its present size of twenty members, which meet to deliberate on matters predominantly of global economic concern.

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### **G77**

The Group of developing countries formed in 1964 to promote the collective interests and the negotiating power of the global South, especially in relation

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to global economic issues.

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### **Genealogy**

A mode of doing history (or counter-history) that exposes the relations between [power](#) and knowledge and that questions dominant notions of origins and progress.

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### **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)**

Established under the [United Nations](#) to develop rules governing international trade. Founded on [liberal](#) principles of [free trade](#), its main objectives are to reduce and eliminate tariff barriers and to provide a forum in which [states](#) can mediate disputes and negotiate a more open system of trade. In 1995, the GATT was replaced by the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#).

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### **Geneva conventions**

Consists of four [international humanitarian law](#) treaties codified in 1949, and the additional protocols of 1977. The 1949 conventions relate to the treatment of prisoners of [war](#), the treatment of military personnel when sick or wounded at sea or on land, and the protection of civilians during war. The two additional protocols of 1977 outline protections due to the victims of international and [civil wars](#).

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### **Genocide**

The deliberate and systematic act of destroying in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. It is outlawed under the [UN](#) Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide. Twentieth-century cases of genocide include the Turkish genocide of the Armenians, the Nazi genocide of the Jews and others, and the Hutu genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda.

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## **Geopolitics**

The study of the effects of geography (human and physical) on international politics. It is often closely related to the [balance of power](#).

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## **Globalisation**

The stretching and intensification of social and economic relations across the globe made possible by new communication and computer technologies and advances in transport. It is thought by many to inaugurate an unprecedented degree of global interconnectedness, although some deny its novelty by pointing to similar levels of [interdependence](#) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Still others criticise globalisation for being a vehicle of [neoliberal](#) ideology.

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## **Gramscian**

An adjective describing a perspective on international relations influenced by the work of Italian socialist and union organiser Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Gramsci was a [Marxist](#) who cautioned against over-emphasising the economic ‘base’ of society. He argued that the ‘superstructure’ of society, which includes schools, churches and civil society more generally, also plays a vital part in the reproduction of [capitalist](#) societies and in their possible transformation. In International Relations, his work has been adapted to focus on the ways in which ideas and [states](#) interact to maintain dominant world [orders](#).

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## **Great power**

A state possessing, and seen to possess, multiple dimensions of [power](#) and its sources, including military, political, economic, ideological, territorial, natural resources, people and so on.

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## **Grotian**

An adjective describing a perspective on international relations influenced by the work of Dutch seventeenth-century jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645).

Closely associated with the [English School](#), the Grotian tradition of international thought places great emphasis on the rules and [norms](#) of international relations. It aims to secure [order](#) and coexistence among [states](#) rather than the [Kantian](#) ideal of perpetual [peace](#) or the [Hobbesian](#) horror of ‘[war](#) of all against all’.

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## **Guerrilla warfare**

‘Hit and run’ tactics employed by small, highly mobile bands of armed forces against more conventional armed, and usually invading or occupying, forces. Guerrillas operate by taking full advantage of their environment, both physical and urban. It was a tactic employed to good effect by Germanic tribes against the Roman army, and by the Vietcong against the United States in Vietnam.

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## **Hegemony**

The preponderance of [power](#) and influence by a [state](#) (the hegemon). Though it involves coercive power, hegemony without ideological or political suasion is unlikely. [Gramsci](#) proposed thinking of hegemony as a centaur (half man, half beast).

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## **Hermeneutics**

The art or [method](#) of [interpretation](#). Derived from Hermes, the messenger god, hermeneutics originally referred to the textual interpretation of the Bible, but in modern times it refers more generally to the interpretation of texts, [theories](#) and ideas, as well as the action and behaviour of social and political agents. Its

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main purpose is to further understanding of others' meanings or intentions. It is often contrasted with *explanation*.

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### **Hierarchy**

The structured differentiation of rank and authority. In the study of international relations hierarchy is often opposed to [anarchy](#).

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### **Hobbesian**

An adjective describing a perspective on international relations influenced by the work of seventeenth-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). He emphasised the political importance of [state sovereignty](#) and the necessity of [states](#) to be prepared to use threats and force to achieve [security](#). He is thought to have likened international relations to a 'state of [war](#)', a lawless, insecure and conflict-ridden condition that he described as a 'war of all against all'.

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### **Human rights**

The entitlements thought to be due to all humans simply by virtue of their humanity. Human rights are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which is a non-binding document, and in the legally binding Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (both 1966).

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### **Humanitarian intervention**

The coercive interference in a [sovereign state](#) to prevent or end massive [human rights](#) violations. Generally thought to be prohibited by [international law](#) and the [UN Charter](#), it has enjoyed increased international support since the brutal conflicts, [ethnic cleansing](#) and [genocides](#) witnessed in the 1990s. [NATO](#)'s 1999 bombing of Serbia to protect Kosovars remains the most

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controversial instance of humanitarian intervention. See [responsibility to protect](#).

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### **Humanitarianism**

Refers to the array of moral, political, medical and logistical practices designed to alleviate human suffering, especially in the aftermath of natural or political disasters.

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### **Idealism**

A [theory](#) of international relations whose chief purpose is to eradicate [war](#). Flourishing after World War I, it embraced the [Enlightenment](#) and [liberal](#) values of [peace](#) and progress, believing that peace could be achieved through [collective security](#) arrangements, respect for the rule of law and greater [interdependence](#). See also [utopianism](#).

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### **Identity**

The distinctive purpose ascribed to a state, including self-understandings. A key term in [constructivism](#).

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### **Imperialism**

The projection or expansion of a [state](#)'s domination over foreign lands and peoples through conquest and control. Often associated with a high-handed and rather brutal treatment of those under imperial [power](#).

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### **Institutionalism**

The view that institutions (both formal and informal sets of rules and norms) matter in international relations by setting standards, shaping expectations, constraining behaviour and establishing patterns of interaction. See [regime](#).

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### **Insurgency**

Political violence with the subversive intent of destabilising or overthrowing a ruling government.

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### **Interdependence**

The mutual dependence developed among [states](#) by utilising new technologies and through the growth of international cross-border commerce, communication and travel. A term used before [globalisation](#) became popular.

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### **International humanitarian law**

Set of rules integrating [human rights](#) into [international law](#) with the purpose of protecting individuals (civilians and combatants) during times of [war](#). It comprises the four [Geneva conventions](#) and two additional protocols. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is the custodian of these rules.

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### **International law**

Set of rules applying to [sovereign states](#). Traditionally, it has focused exclusively on [states](#), but since World War II it increasingly has incorporated rights and duties of individuals. The sources of international law include custom, treaties, judicial decisions and esteemed legal opinion. Because they define law as orders backed by force, [realists](#) are sceptical that international law, which lacks an enforcement mechanism, deserves the status of law.

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### **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

Established as part of the [Bretton Woods](#) system, its main task is to create a stable international exchange rate system and to provide emergency assistance to [states](#) facing temporary [balance-of-payments](#) problems.

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### **International society**

Exists when two or more [states](#) become conscious of being bound by common rules and institutions. One of the [English School](#)'s key concepts, international society – or the society of states – allows for cooperation in institutions such as [diplomacy](#) and [international law](#).

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### **International system**

Exists when two or more states have sufficient contact with each other that they become conscious of existing in the same environment and of the need to consider other [states](#)' interests and capabilities in the pursuit of their own interests.

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### **Intersubjective**

Ideas and beliefs existing among conscious actors or social agents. Generally refers to the sets of ideas and beliefs shared collectively by actors (such as states in international society). Key term in [constructivism](#) and [Critical Theory](#).

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### **Inter-war years**

the period between World War I and World War II. A period characterised by international institution-building and [liberal](#) hopes for peace, as well as economic turbulence, the emerging great powers of the United States and the Soviet Union, and the rise of [fascism](#). It is also the time when IR as an academic discipline became institutionalised.

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### **Islamic State (IS)**

A militant *jihadi* sect of Sunni Islam adhering to fundamentalist Wahhabi doctrine prepared to use cruel and barbaric forms of violence in its struggle to realise its political vision of a revived caliphate or theocratic state.

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### **Just war**

A [war](#) deemed to be conducted justly or lawfully (*jus in bello* in Latin) and for a just or lawful cause (*jus ad bellum*). The tradition of distinguishing between just and unjust wars goes back to antiquity, was continued by Christian theologians throughout the Middle Ages and persists in secular form today. Since the late nineteenth century, numerous [international humanitarian law](#) treaties outlining prohibited conduct during war have come into force. [Humanitarian intervention](#) has, however, forced a reconsideration of rules relating to *jus ad bellum*.

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### **Kantian**

An adjective describing a perspective on international relations influenced by the work of eighteenth-century [Enlightenment](#) philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Most famous in international relations for his essay ‘Towards Perpetual Peace’, Kant argued that [states](#) ought to subject their conduct to political, legal and moral rules consistent with [liberalism](#) so that [peace](#), justice and freedom can flourish for the whole community of humankind.

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### **Keynesian**

Adjective describing an economic doctrine based on the thought of British economist, John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946). He argued that free market principles must be tempered by measured governmental interventions to maintain social [order](#).

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### **Kyoto Protocol**

An agreement signed at the 1997 Kyoto (Japan) climate change conference to address global warming. [states](#), excluding most notably Australia and the US, committed themselves to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 5 per cent below 1990 levels by the year 2012.

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## **Liberalism**

A political [theory](#) that prizes individual freedom. It believes individuals should be free to do as they please, without the interference of others, so long as they do not harm or limit the freedom of others. In international relations it has tended to focus on the development of [international law](#), the spread of [democracy](#) ([democratic peace theory](#)) and the expansion of [free trade](#). Immanuel [Kant](#) is one of the leading liberal theorists of international relations.

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## **Lockean**

An adjective describing a political worldview informed by the ideas of John Locke (1632–1704). Often associated with the [English School](#), and holding affinities with the [Grotian](#) tradition, Lockean political thought emphasises individual rights, the rule of law and the rational capacities of humankind as the key elements of political [order](#) within and between [states](#). Locke did not conceive the state of nature as a [Hobbesian](#) state of war, but as a condition where reason may still prevail and foster sociability and cooperation.

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## **Loss-of-strength gradient**

A concept that posits an inverse relation between distance and the exercise of state power. A state's ability to exercise military and political power is diminished the further it seeks to extend that power.

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## **Machiavellianism**

A term usually employed pejoratively to criticise cunning or ruthless political behaviour. It derives from the name of Florentine diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), especially the advice he gives to rulers in his infamous tract *The Prince*, written in 1513 though not published until after his

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death in 1532. It would be wrong to assume, however, that Machiavelli was Machiavellian.

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### **Marshall Plan**

The US aid program designed to reconstruct and stimulate the economies of Western Europe after World War II. Introduced in 1947, it is best understood as the economic aspect of the US strategy of [containment](#) alongside the [Truman Doctrine](#). It aimed to stabilise Western Europe's economies and immunise them against the threat of [communism](#).

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### **Marxism**

An adjective describing a perspective on international relations influenced by the work of nineteenth-century thinker, Karl Marx (1818–83). Marxism's most central feature is its powerful critique of [capitalism](#) for exploiting and dehumanising workers. Marxists believe that international relations is shaped by the changing patterns of capitalism and the conflict it generates between classes. It thus tends to see [states](#) and the [international system](#) as a reflection of deeper socio-economic structures and processes. Marxists believe that capitalism is only a stage on the way to a truly [emancipated](#) society of humankind.

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### **Mercantilism**

A policy-system developed by many early modern European [states](#) to increase national wealth for the purposes of enhancing the state's [power](#). This wealth was produced by a mix of [protectionism](#) and favourable balance of payments to grow the state's stocks of gold bullion. Often contrasted to [free trade](#).

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### **Methodology**

The study of different ways of producing valid knowledge.

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## **Multilateralism**

A term referring to international structures and processes in which many [states](#) discuss, negotiate and decide on matters of international significance. Compare with [bilateralism](#) and [unilateralism](#).

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## **Multinational corporation (MNC)**

A commercial actor with branches or operations in several countries and interconnected business strategies. Increasingly, such corporations see the globe rather than any single national economy as their marketplace. They tend to advocate [globalisation](#) and [neoliberal](#) policy ideals. Also see [transnational corporation \(TNC\)](#).

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## **Multipolarity**

Refers to an [international system](#) where more than two powerful [states](#) dominate. [Realism](#) sees multipolar systems as more unstable than [bipolar](#) ones.

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## **Nation**

A community of people bound together by belief in common historical, cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic ties. Nations quite often, but not always, demand exclusive allegiance from their citizens.

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## **National interest**

A notoriously plastic term that refers to the [state](#)'s foreign policy aims. The national interest is said to be the same regardless of the government in [power](#), but different governments will hold different ideological agendas and priorities, meaning that the national interest will change accordingly.

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## **Nationalism**

The political ideology that prizes and exalts in the [nation](#) as the primary and exclusive source of allegiance.

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### **Neorealism**

A [theory](#) of international relations that seeks to improve upon [realism](#) by making it more scientific (based on [positivism](#)) and by obtaining a more objective picture of how the structure of [anarchy](#) shapes and shoves [states](#). Most closely associated with the work of Kenneth Waltz, neorealism argues, contrary to older versions of realism, that states seek to maximise [security](#) rather than [power](#).

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### **Neoliberalism**

Used in two senses. One is as a [theory](#) of international relations which argues, contrary to [realism](#) and [neorealism](#), that cooperation is possible even in conditions of international [anarchy](#). A revised version of [liberalism](#), this neoliberalism focuses on the rules and [norms states](#) are socialised to accept by working through international institutions or [regimes](#). It is most closely associated with the work of Robert Keohane. The other use of neoliberalism is as a late form of [liberalism](#) that focuses heavily on free-market economic policies of trade liberalisation, deregulation of financial markets and the workplace, and privatisation of government-owned industries and utilities. In Australia, this latter sense often goes by the name of 'economic [rationalism](#)'.

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### **Nesting**

A strategy whereby a group of actors collectively subsume themselves under a broader identity, thereby changing the identity of all the actors in the process.

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### **Non-governmental organisation (NGO)**

Specialised not-for-profit [non-state actors](#) that seek to raise consciousness and change the activities of governments and populations on a variety of issues. NGOs have proliferated over the last century, advocating and lobbying on issues such as [human rights](#), landmines, poverty, animal rights and the environment, among many others.

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### **Non-refoulement**

French for ‘non-return’. Used in diplomacy and international law with respect to refugees who have a widely recognised right under international law to not be forcibly returned to the places they have fled.

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### **Non-state actor**

An actor not part of the official [state](#) or governmental apparatuses.

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### **Normative**

An adjective referring to the moral quality of something. For example, normative [theories](#) of international relations are primarily concerned with posing moral questions of actors or assessing the moral justification and evaluation of structures and processes.

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### **Norms**

Moral standards or expectations.

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### **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

A military [alliance](#) formed in 1949 by Western European and Northern American countries aligned against the Soviet Union during the [Cold War](#). Unlike the [Warsaw Pact](#), it did not die with the end of the Cold War. Instead, it expanded by absorbing former Warsaw Pact countries into its membership.

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### **Ontology**

The branch of philosophy that studies the nature of being. It is concerned with determining what exists in the world and the character of the different things that exist. In other words, it regards the ‘furniture’ of the world.

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### **Order**

A sustained pattern of social arrangements. Order should not be confused with [peace](#) or stability. Peace is a particular order whereby the pattern of social arrangements excludes [war](#). But, unlike peace and war, order and war are not mutually exclusive conditions. Order is also distinguishable from stability because stability and instability are properties of order. That is, orders may be more or less stable or unstable.

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### **Patriarchy**

A form of social organisation where men dominate and govern at the expense of women. It is an important concept in [feminism](#).

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### ***pax Americana***

A Latin phrase that translates as ‘American peace’. Drawing upon the older phrase *pax romana* (Roman peace), it conjures ideas of American [imperialism](#).

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### **Peace**

Most simply, it is the absence of [war](#). This definition has been found wanting because it says nothing about the positive requirements of peace, which are usually thought to include justice and basic human needs, among other things.

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### **Peacebuilding**

Initiatives taken to rebuild political and legal institutions and civilian infrastructure, including markets, in post-conflict situations. It has the long-

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term objective of establishing lasting [peace](#) and prosperity within stable political conditions.

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### **Peacekeeping**

Military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a conflict with the purpose of maintaining the terms of a truce or ceasefire. Only a temporary or provisional measure, peacekeeping is intended to open opportunities for dialogue among the parties that will lead to lasting [peace](#).

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### **Philosophical idealism**

The view that the external or material world is fundamentally shaped by our ideas or mental representations.

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### **Positivism**

An approach to knowledge based on the conviction that the human and social sciences, including the study of international relations, must emulate the physical or natural sciences by employing [empiricist](#) methods. This means facts must be separated from values and beliefs to allow for objective investigation and explanation of [empirical](#) or observable phenomena (namely, facts). [critical theories](#) dispute the feasibility and desirability of completely separating facts and values in the human and social sciences.

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### **Postmodernism**

A theoretical approach to the social and human sciences that questions not just [positivism](#) but aspects of [hermeneutics](#) too for believing that all questions can be finally resolved by attaining the Truth. For postmodernists, there are likely to be as many truths as there are perspectives on any given issue since there is no single vantage point from which all social, political and moral questions can be addressed. It is closely associated with [deconstruction](#) and [genealogy](#).

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## **Power**

Classically defined as the ability to get an actor to do what they would otherwise not do. This is power in the sense of domination or power over others. But power can also be thought of in terms of capability or power to do or act. [realist](#) theories hold the belief that international relations are a constant struggle for power, usually defined in materials terms. See also [soft power](#).

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## **Power politics**

A nickname given to hard-nosed [realist](#) policies because of the great emphasis realists place on the struggle for [power](#).

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## **Protectionism**

An economic policy designed to cushion or protect national industries from international competition. Often pursued by the imposition of taxes, tariffs and quotas on imports.

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## ***Raison d'état***

French for reason of state. It refers to the logic that drives policies employed in the service of the [state](#) itself. Such policies do not serve the common good or the welfare of the population, they are intended to preserve and strengthen the state apparatus alone. Commonly associated with [realist](#) policies.

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## **Ratification**

A legal term describing the act by which a state confirms being bound by a treaty or convention. The legislative procedures for ratification may vary from one state to another.

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## **Rationalism**

In the United States, the term is most commonly used to refer to theories employing [positivist methods](#), in contrast to [reflectivism](#). Elsewhere, rationalism is sometimes used, by Martin Wight, for example, to refer to [Grotianism](#). See also [realism](#) and [reflectivism](#).

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## **Realism**

A tradition of thought that posits the struggle for [power](#) and the condition of [anarchy](#) as two fundamental realities of international relations. These are realities with which both [states](#) and students of the subject must grapple.

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## **Realpolitik**

German term connoting hard-nosed [realist](#) politics. It is more or less a synonym of the English term [power politics](#).

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## **Reflectivism**

A term used in the United States to refer to [critical theories](#) in contrast to [rationalism](#).

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## **Refugee**

A person forced to flee their country because of persecution. For centuries, refugees have fled their homelands because their lives and livelihoods were in grave danger for no other reason than their religion, their ethnicity, their race, their gender or their political beliefs. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the formation of the [UN](#) High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) have helped draw attention to the global flows and plight of refugees.

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## **Regime**

Agreed rules, norms and decision-making procedures that set standards, shape expectations, constrain behaviour and establish patterns of interaction. Also see [institutionalism](#).

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### **Regulative**

Having the power of governing or controlling the behaviour of an actor. A regulative rule specifies the range of actions considered legitimate by distinguishing between proscribed and permitted actions. See [constitutive](#) rule.

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### **Responsibility to protect (R2P)**

The doctrine that neither individual [states](#) nor the international community can stand idly by while large-scale violations of [human rights](#) occur. According to R2P, states individually and collectively have a duty to undertake some form of preventative or ameliorative action. R2P was given its most important formulation in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty chaired by Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun. See also [humanitarian intervention](#).

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### **Revisionist**

An adjective used to describe [states](#) intent on challenging the prevailing international [order](#). Also used to describe histories written to offer a different political viewpoint.

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### **Revolution**

A sudden, usually violent change of government. The great revolutions (England in 1688, America in 1776, France in 1789, Russia in 1917) promised to [emancipate](#) the people from the tyranny of the so-called 'old regime', although on occasion the revolutionaries have brutally [terrorised](#) the people after seizing [power](#).

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## **Revolution in military affairs**

The transformation in the way [war](#) is fought. In the West, especially the United States, technological advances have led to changes in the organisation and operation of armed forces, and in the military hardware and weapons systems available to them. Some commentators now speak of a ‘Western way of war’, which depends heavily on taking full advantage of new war technologies to fight wars from the skies or from afar so as to minimise their casualties. The accuracy of so-called ‘smart’ weapons is also claimed to minimise civilian casualties.

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## **Revolutionism**

A tradition of thought committed to the [cosmopolitan](#) ideal of realising the moral and political community of humankind. It often possesses a missionary character and is committed to the [revolutionary](#) transformation of international order.

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## **Rogue state**

A [state](#) deemed to be a serial violator of [international society](#)’s rules, [norms](#) and standards of expected behaviour. A highly subjective political term, the rogue state has been used by the United States to decry its enemies, but critics of US foreign policy have also labelled the United States a rogue state for its perceived violations of international rules and norms.

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## **SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization)**

Designed to serve as a collective defence organisation during the Cold War, it existed from 1955 to 1977. Its eight member states included Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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## **Secession**

Breaking away or separating from an existing [state](#) to become an independent [sovereign state](#).

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## **Secularism**

A movement aimed at depriving religion of political effects in the public sphere. Privileging the temporal (earthly) over the transcendental, it seeks to cultivate spheres of social and political life free from references to a deity or the afterlife.

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## **Secularist settlement**

A mode of containing and managing religion along [secularist](#) lines. Rather than construe secularism as a fixed, final achievement, it views it as a historically and politically contingent attempt to determine the relationship between politics and religion.

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## **Security**

The condition of being free from harm or threat. Over recent decades, scholars and practitioners have increasingly spoken of human security, but traditionally the [state](#) is the referent of security – that is, the actor to be made secure. One of the enduring difficulties for states in achieving security, according to [realists](#), is that they must deal with the [security dilemma](#). In recent decades, attempts have been made to overcome the dilemma by reconceptualising security in terms of [common security](#).

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## **Security community**

A group of [states](#) that have integrated their social, economic and political structures to a degree where [war](#) no longer seems likely among them. The European Union (EU) is the best example.

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## Security dilemma

A condition in which [states](#) find themselves because every measure they have taken to make themselves more secure may simply urge other states to respond in such a manner that leads all states to end up feeling less secure and more anxious. The security dilemma arises because states will never know with absolute certainty what the intentions and capabilities are of other states. [Realists](#) believe there is nothing that can be done to overcome this dilemma. [Liberals](#) believe confidence and security-building measures may open opportunities for going beyond the security dilemma. Also see [common security](#).

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## Self-determination

The doctrine proclaiming that each [nation](#) or people should possess independence and govern themselves. It is a key concept of [liberalism](#) and was advocated by US President Woodrow Wilson in the early twentieth century. It was also an important feature of [anti-colonial](#) struggles and the [decolonisation](#) process, and has a natural affinity with [nationalism](#).

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## Soft power

Coined by US IR scholar Joseph S. Nye to refer to the intangible, non-material and non-military elements of US [power](#), including its ideas, ideology, culture, institutions and so on. As a form of power, it works through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion ('hard' power).

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## Sovereign state

The modern form of political society in which authority is concentrated in a single, supreme decision-maker. See [state](#) and [sovereignty](#).

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## Sovereignty

Denotes a single, supreme political decision-making authority. In early modern Europe, the monarch was the sovereign. In modern [states](#), sovereignty tends to lie with the executive arm of government. A controversial term, sovereignty depends on authority, not [power](#) – that is, the sovereign claims the right or authority to decide matters of interest to the state, even if they cannot control everything that occurs within its territory.

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### **Sphere of influence**

A [geopolitical](#) term referring to an area (composed of multiple countries) under the informal control of a [superpower](#). During the [Cold War](#), there was a mutual unspoken understanding between the United States and Soviet Union about the rights of the superpower to intervene within its sphere of influence.

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### **State**

A political society comprising a government that extends its authority and [power](#) over a territory and its inhabitants (citizens and foreign visitors). Several features have become characteristic of the modern state: [sovereignty](#), [nationalism](#) and the monopoly over the instruments of violence.

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### **State-centric**

A view of international relations that places the [state](#) at the centre. State-centrism underplays the significance of [non-state actors](#), believing they have little impact on issues of international importance.

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### **Status quo**

The existing state of affairs.

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### **Superpower**

A pre-eminent [state](#) whose [power](#) is vastly greater than that of other states. The term was first used to describe the United States, United Kingdom and Soviet Union immediately after World War II. For the duration of the [Cold War](#), only the United States and Soviet Union retained the title.

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### **Terrorism**

The use of violence designed to spread fear for political purposes. Sometimes this violence is aimed at so-called ‘legitimate’ targets, such as politicians or military forces; at other times, it is aimed at civilians.

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### **Theory**

Reflective or abstract thought aimed at an understanding or explanation of social phenomena that goes beyond common sense. It makes us more self-conscious of our assumptions and prejudices. Some theories, such as [positivism](#), may aim for universal explanatory laws. Others, such as [critical theories](#), tend to be more [hermeneutic](#) in approach.

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### **Transnational corporation (TNC)**

A commercial actor with branches or operations in several countries and interconnected business strategies. Increasingly, such corporations see the globe rather than any single national economy as their marketplace. TNCs tend to see the globe as a borderless market, which is why they advocate [globalisation](#) and [neoliberal](#) policy ideals. Also see [multinational corporation \(MNC\)](#).

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### **Transnationalism**

The process and condition of cross-border interaction. [Globalisation](#) is often associated with increased levels of transnational or cross-border activity.

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## Truman Doctrine

US policy commitment to provide military aid to Western European countries in an effort to resist [communism](#). Originally offered to Turkey and Greece, the military aid and support eventually were extended to other European countries thought to be under threat of communist subversion. Announced in 1947, it is best thought of as the political-military aspect of the US strategy of [containment](#) alongside the [Marshall Plan](#).

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## Unilateralism

A term referring to decisions and actions taken by a [state](#) on its own, without consulting others – not even friends and allies – on matters of international significance. Compare with [bilateralism](#) and [multilateralism](#).

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## Unipolarity

Refers to an [international system](#) where one overwhelmingly powerful [state](#) dominates. Some commentators regard the post-[Cold War](#) era as unipolar because the United States seems unchallengeable as the sole [superpower](#). Compare with [bipolarity](#) and [multipolarity](#).

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## United Nations (UN)

An international organisation whose membership is open to all [sovereign states](#). Founded in 1945, its primary purpose is to maintain international [peace](#) and [security](#) through [diplomacy](#) and negotiation, where possible. It comprises six principal organs: the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Secretariat, the Trusteeship Council, the Economic and Social Council, and the International Court of Justice, of which the Security Council is the most important politically because it has the authority to pass binding resolutions.

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## UN Charter

The set of rules that acts as a kind of constitution for the [United Nations](#). Among other things, the Charter prohibits [war](#) or the threat of war except in self-defence or when the UN Security Council authorises war. It also prohibits intervention in a [sovereign state](#)'s domestic affairs, unless authorised by the Security Council.

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### **Utilitarianism**

A philosophical doctrine, proposed by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), that all our actions should be aimed at producing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.

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### **Utopianism**

A belief, doctrine or ideology committed to utopia – that is, an imaginary place of ideal social, moral and political conditions. A term often used to disparage [idealism](#).

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### **War**

Organised political violence or armed conflict. The opposite of [peace](#). As it is conventionally understood, war involves two armed forces, but the term is also used to cover asymmetrical wars where an official armed force confronts an unofficial force of [insurgents](#), [guerrillas](#) or [terrorists](#).

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### **Warsaw Pact**

A military [alliance](#) formed in 1955 by Eastern European countries aligned with the Soviet Union during the [Cold War](#). It was largely a response to the formation of [NATO](#). Its members were the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Albania (until 1961). It dissolved when the Cold War ended.

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## **Washington Consensus**

A set of [neoliberal](#) policy prescriptions that find strong support among the Washington-based [multilateral](#) economic institutions: the [International Monetary Fund](#), the [World Bank](#) and the US Treasury.

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## **Weapons of mass destruction (WMD)**

A term referring to nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. These three classes of weapon are thought to be more destructive than conventional weapons and likely to inflict greater collateral damage. Each is also the subject of an international convention or treaty.

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## **Westphalia, Peace of/Treaties of**

Refers to the two treaties (of Osnabrück and Münster) that brought the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) to an end. The Thirty Years' War was essentially fought over the German lands of the Holy Roman Empire to resolve disputes relating to religion and the relative political rights of the Emperor and the emerging territorial [states](#) under the Empire's jurisdiction. As significant as the year 1648 is, it is overstating things to say, as many scholars do, that the [sovereign state](#) was born in the Treaties of Westphalia.

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## **World Bank**

Originally formed to help post-World War II economic reconstruction, the World Bank provides funds and long-term loans at reduced interest rates to developing countries. Part of the [Bretton Woods](#) system, its policy prescriptions are consistent with the [Washington Consensus](#). The Bank has been subject to considerable intense criticism for uncritically accepting and promoting [neoliberal](#) principles.

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## **World Trade Organization (WTO)**

Formerly the [\*General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade \(GATT\)\*](#), the WTO provides a more permanent institution within which [\*states\*](#) can work towards the reduction and elimination of tariff barriers and in which they can mediate disputes and negotiate a more open, [\*free trade\*](#) system.

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### **Zero-sum game**

A situation in which gains made by one actor unavoidably come at the expense of another or others.

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